

PREFACE

Last week we learned how the first-century Roman elite defined poverty—that one could believably claim to be poor while owning multiple estates—and that the common people were not considered poor, but simply nonexistent: of no consequence, no worth, invisible. Then there is *America's* idea of poverty: two cars in the garage, cable TV, a smart phone, good clothes, your neighbor's taxes buying your food for you.

This week, as we continue in the passage that closes Chapter One of First Corinthians, we will learn, among other things, *God's* definition of poverty. The fascinating paradox is that God's idea of being poor is deeper, more profound, more *real*, yet ultimately more rewarding.

Read James 2:5.

One more:

Read Matthew 5:3.

In the NT, the "poor" seem to make out pretty well. How can this be? Is it because His idea of poor isn't really that poor at all? No,

poor = *ptochos* (pto-hos') = from *ptosso* (**to crouch**; akin to <G4422> (*ptoo*) and the alternate of <G4098> (*pipto*)); **a beggar (as cringing)**, i.e. **pauper** (strictly denoting absolute or public mendicancy, although also used in a qualified or relative sense; whereas <G3993> (*penes*) properly means only straitened circumstances in private), literal (often as noun) or figurative (distressed) :- beggar (-ly), poor; **of one who crouches and cowers**.

God's idea of poverty is *real* poverty: cringing, cowering destitution. It is a picture of someone with no resources left of their own, utterly dependent on others.

This level of destitution is used in the NT to describe favorably those who understand their need for God through Christ Jesus, that without Him they have and are nothing. In the Beatitudes, with which He opens his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus says that those who recognize their own spiritual poverty—and thus recognize their need for Christ—will be granted "the kingdom of heaven"—not a new car, not a house, not food for a meal, but an *eternal* kingdom.

Read 1 Corinthians 1:26-31.

v29

Verse 29 supplies the ultimate "why" for the "what" of vv26-28. Notice, first, how Paul connects v29 with v26. In v26 he states that "there were not many wise [in the Corinth church] according to the flesh"—his first use of the Greek *sarx*. In the KJV we see that in v29 he uses the term again: "so that no *sarx* [flesh] may boast before God."

...so that no man may boast before God.

The phrase “so that no man” (KJV: that no flesh) is a Hebraism reflecting the OT idiom *kal-basar*, and we can entertain two interpretations of Paul’s use of this.

- First, the word *sarx* (flesh) traditionally referred to all human beings, whether Jew or Greek: man, mankind.
- Second, Paul is here developing the idea of *sarx* into something fairly new in Christ. More than just representing humanity in general, *sarx* refers to the fragility and inadequacy of man when compared to God. But again, Paul did not invent this; Christ Himself used it in this way on the night He was betrayed.

Read Mark 14:37-38.

It can take years, sometimes decades for this truth to sink into, well, flesh. We are born with the proclivity to think highly of ourselves, and in today’s society this is reinforced at an early age, when children are taught to have, above all else, a nauseating level of self-esteem: when they are told that they have won, even when they haven’t (“everyone is a winner,” and receives a trophy for “participation”) and that they are smart when they are not (“Good for you, Janey. If you believe that two and two equal five, then that is *your* truth.”).

With this indoctrination it can take many years for the *real* truth to sink in—that we do not know everything; that what we believe, or feel, or even think may be absolutely wrong—that two and two do *not* equal five. More to the point, even for the follower of Christ it may take many years of the Spirit working in his or her life, of earnest prayer, of reading and studying God’s word to understand that before our God—in His presence—we stand utterly destitute of anything of which we might boast.

- We belong to Him not because we decided to, but because He chose us.
- Our sins are forgiven not because of our penitence, but because of Christ.
- We are loved by Him not because we are lovable or lovely, but because of His grace.
- Everything we are and have and will be is because of Christ Jesus and the Father.

It would be fun—and profitable—to delve deeper into this, because what v29 is ultimately speaking to is our bowing before Almighty God, and acknowledging His lordship over our lives in all things. But let’s push on to complete this first chapter.

v30

Verse 30 gives the empirical evidence for the statement in v29.

Read v30.

by His doing / because of Him / of Him

In Paul’s letter to the Ephesians he captures the fullness of this truth. First he speaks of our election by God.

Read Ephesians 1:3-4a.

Then he speaks of this “gift of God” saying that not only did God select us, but He *fashioned* us specifically for those things we would require to serve in His name.

Read Ephesians 2:8-10.

He fashions the job, and fashions us for the job. Understanding all that, what have we to boast about?

...you are in Christ Jesus

When one collects up all the evidence, from 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Romans, et al, it is at once overwhelming, encouraging, humbling and motivating to realize that our relationship with God is all His doing. *By God's doing we are in Christ!* Most of us can recite Romans 8:28 from memory, and my bet is that when we do the first thought that comes to mind is that God causes "all things to work together for good" right now, in the here and now of our lives. Which is perfectly true. But read on in that passage; He means this to apply to our lives long before we were ever born.

Read Romans 8:28-30.

I like how Gordon Fee summarizes Paul's point in our text in v30: "In contrast to the world, **you owe your existence to the prior activity of God**, which has been effected in history through Christ Jesus."

who became to us wisdom from God, and righteousness and sanctification, and redemption,

We need to chew on this a little bit to understand what Paul is really saying. Primarily because of the KJV's "...Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom," this phrase has been interpreted to mean that Christ became wisdom for us so that we might thereby become wise. MacArthur, among others, holds to this interpretation:

First, believers are given God's wisdom. They not only are *saved* by God's wisdom rather than their own but are *given* God's wisdom to replace their own.

This interpretation then is applied, as well, to the following three "gifts": believers receive God's righteousness, God's sanctification (or holiness), God's redemption. But, first, do you notice something not quite right with this last "gift"? The first three—wisdom, righteousness, and holiness—are all qualities of God that we, in and through Christ, positionally acquire. But God was never a slave, and so was never redeemed. We *do* have redemption in Christ, but it is not a quality of God passed to us through Christ.

Gordon Fee takes a different position on this verse, and I think it makes a lot of sense. It is a subtle difference, but a difference indeed. In a passage in Jeremiah we have a clue to this difference.

Read Jeremiah 23:5-6.

Not, through this "righteous Branch" (Christ) will we receive God's righteousness, but God will declare this righteous Branch *to be* "Yahweh our righteousness." Do you see the difference? Jesus is not just the channel of salvation, He *is* our salvation—and v30 gives us synonyms for this salvation: righteousness, sanctification, redemption.

Christ is all in all. I am not *made* holy because of Christ, in the sense that now I can stand on my own because now I am holy. No, my holiness is *in Christ*; it resides in Him—not in me. I have been made holy *positionally* by Him, but take Him out of the equation, even post-salvation (theoretically), and my “holiness” vaporizes in thin air. *Christ* is my wisdom, *Christ* is my righteousness, *Christ* is my holiness, *Christ* is my redemption—which is to say, Christ is my salvation.

This is the meaning of “to us” or “for us” in v30, which leads us into v31.

v31

so that, just as it is written, “Let him who boasts, boast in the LORD.”

Here Paul adapts a passage from Jeremiah to fit his context.

Read Jeremiah 9:23-24.

Since v18 of this first chapter Paul has been addressing the business of wisdom—the wisdom of the world vs. the wisdom from God—and although it would seem that he has reached an obvious conclusion with v31, he is really just getting warmed up on the topic, which will continue through 2:5 and beyond.

God sent His Son to be crucified for our sins—that is the gospel: Christ crucified (v23). To the world this is utter foolishness: placing one’s faith in a murdered Messiah. But in that “foolishness” Christ became to us wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption. That is, in the “foolishness” of the cross, we were saved!

Because of that, we have literally nothing in which to boast—except the Lord.