

## CHURCH OF THE REDEEMER

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| Series: | Special New Year's Message | Pastor/Teacher     |
| Text:   | 1 Corinthians 1:29-31      | Gary L. W. Johnson |
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### GLORYING IN CHRIST JESUS

Most of us find the word *boasting* somewhat distasteful. It conjures up the image of a self-promoting braggart. Webster defines boasting as displaying pride in a vain fashion with a view to self-commendation. As much as we may abhor boasting in others, we all have, at one time or another, succumbed to ostentatiously advertising ourselves or our accomplishments to those around us. We may try the indirect and subtle approach (hoping not to be detected in our efforts), or we may be outspoken in our trumpet blowing. Either way, boasting is neither a nice word nor a nice action. The word translated *boasting* in the NIV translation of 1 Corinthians 1:29-31 is rendered *glorying* in the Authorized Version. The Greek verb behind our English word is *kauchaomai*. This word does not always carry the same type of negative connotation that our word often does. In its various forms, it appears 58 times in the New Testament, with 54 occurrences in Paul's writings. The Apostle uses the word in four different senses: (1) In the bad sense, much like our English word, especially when used in reference to boasting before God of one's good works (Romans 3:27; 4:2; Ephesians 2:9). This kind of boasting is always condemned. As Archibald Alexander wrote long ago, "The religion of the gospel is calculated to remove every occasion of glorying from the creature."<sup>1</sup> (2) Boasting that is legitimate and can be appropriate as in 2 Corinthians 11:30 and 12:9 where Paul boasts in his weaknesses; (3) Boasting in others, which is really another way of commending people (1 Thessalonians 2:19; 2 Corinthians 9:2, 3); (4) The most important is boasting in Christ (Romans 5:2, 11; 15:17; Galatians 6:14; Philippians 3:3). As Christians, we are to be *proud* of our Savior. "We have a great God who has done great things."<sup>2</sup> We should go about *boasting* to others of the great things He has done. In 1 Corinthians 1:29-31, Paul provides us with just such a list.

I. **THE CHRISTIAN'S SUMMA CUM LAUDE.** The grounds for this highest praise is found in Christ. All the good that we have, we have only in Christ, and we know of these things only through the Scriptures.<sup>3</sup> Note the riches that are bestowed upon believers.<sup>4</sup>

A. **Wisdom.** In Proverbs 8, wisdom is the personification of one of the names of the Son of God.<sup>5</sup> In what sense is Christ the wisdom of God? Christ is the wisdom of God to us in at least two senses; first, He is the brightest display of the infinite wisdom of God. How so? Because it is *only* through Jesus Christ, the Son of God incarnate, that God could save sinners.<sup>6</sup> Secondly, Christ teaches His people by the Holy Spirit through Scripture all that is necessary to make them wise unto salvation. "He teaches them," says Alexander, "what they ought to believe, and what they ought to do."<sup>7</sup>

- B. **Righteousness.** What is righteousness? It has to do with that which is right, and this in turn points to conformity to a standard. What standard? The standard is God Himself, and this is revealed to us in the Law of God. How is Christ our righteousness? The Apostle is **not** saying that this righteousness is infused in us (as Roman Catholicism teaches), rather the righteousness of Christ is imputed or reckoned to us (cf. Romans 5:17-19). We have no righteousness of our own, and we can never render ourselves righteous in God's sight. It is only **in Christ** that we have no condemnation. It is only **in Christ** that we are acceptable (declared righteous) before God.
- C. **Sanctification.** Righteousness (or justification) is immediate and once and for all. Our justification is **not** subject to increase or decrease. Sanctification is, in essence, separation. We have in Christ a twofold sanctification. First, we have what may be called positional or *definitive* sanctification. In this sense, sanctification is used with reference to some decisive action on God's part that occurs at the inception of the Christian life. This sanctification, writes John Murray, "is one that characterizes the people of God in their identity as called by God's grace."<sup>8</sup> It is another way of saying that Christians are consecrated to God. The second and best-known understanding of sanctification is what is commonly referred to as *progressive* sanctification (and is derived from definitive sanctification). "Justification," says Alexander, "is an act of God altering our relation to the law, and pronouncing us free from its curse, and giving a title to eternal life; but sanctification is a work within us, commenced in our regeneration. The one has for its foundation the perfect satisfaction which Christ has rendered to law and justice; the other is a work of the Holy Spirit, who is the Spirit of Christ within us, purifying us from the pollution of flesh and spirit."<sup>9</sup>
- D. **Redemption.** The word, like sanctification, is used in more than one sense in the Scriptures. Its primary meaning is that of liberation. Christ, by His death, ransomed His people from the slave market of sin (Ephesians 1:7).<sup>10</sup> Here, I think the word has reference to our *final* redemption of our bodies from corruption (cf. Romans 8:35-39; 1 Corinthians 15:50-57).

**CONCLUSION:** The truth of this passage should cause us to rejoice and should move us to praise, adoration and thanksgiving. But you must be *in Christ* to have these riches. God bids you to look to Christ – you who are blind, look! You who are deaf – listen – Hearken diligently unto me, saith the Lord. Do not glory in yourselves; do not boast of your unrighteousness – glory in Christ. This is what the reformational phrase *Soli Deo Gloria* means. It is proper and fitting for us to ascribe all glory to God because we are utterly dependent on Him. The first sermon ever published by Jonathan Edwards was titled *God Glorified in Man's Dependence*. In it he declared, "There is an absolute and universal dependence of the redeemed on God. The nature and contrivance of our redemption is such, that the redeemed are in every thing directly, immediately, and entirely dependent on God: They are dependent on him every way."<sup>11</sup>

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup> A. Alexander, *Practical Sermons* (Presbyterian Board of Publication, 1850), p. 195.

<sup>2</sup> Harold K. Moulton, *The Challenge of the Concordance* (Samuel Bayster & Sons, Inc., 1977), p. 207.

<sup>3</sup> “The Bible,” wrote B. B. Warfield, “is a perfectly plain and a perfectly practical book. The purpose of its gift to the world was not at all that scholars might have a field in which they might try the depth of their insight and expend their best efforts in seeking and securing truth. It was given to plain and practical men, as a prescription to cure them of the disease of sin; to busy and careless men as a trumpet call which they could not choose but hear. Its prime purpose was not to teach either a philosophy, or a science, or an art – not all to systematize knowledge in any sphere of learning. Its prime purpose was simply to tell sinful men what a God they had, and what they practically needed to do in order to serve that God and save their souls.” *Selected Shorter Writings of Benjamin B. Warfield I* (Presbyterian & Reformed, 1970), p. 130.

<sup>4</sup> The reading of the NIV properly captures the Greek text at this point (the Authorized Version gives the impression that there are four distinct qualities). *Righteousness, holiness* and *redemption* are subordinate to *wisdom*, and explanatory of it, cf. the discussion by L. Morris in his *Commentary On the First Epistle of Paul to the Corinthians* (Eerdmans, 1979), p. 50.

<sup>5</sup> The language of Proverbs 8 speaks poetically of a divine attribute and not concretely of a divine person. Unless this is kept in mind, much confusion will result, because the text speaks of wisdom having a beginning, etc. In fact, the arch-heretic of the early Church, Arius, used this passage to argue that Christ was a created being, cf. *The New Dictionary of Theology*, eds. S. B. Ferguson and D. F. Wright (IVP, 1988), p. 726.

<sup>6</sup> Why did God sacrifice His Son on the cross? Could He have saved mankind some other way? The answer is a profound NO. Once God elected to save, He was under absolute necessity to do so by the sacrifice of His Son. “In a word, while it was not inherently necessary for God to save, yet, since salvation had been purposed, it was necessary to secure this salvation through a satisfaction that could be rendered only through substitutionary sacrifice and blood-bought redemption,” John Murray, *Redemption Accomplished and Applied* (Eerdmans, 1975), p. 11.

<sup>7</sup> Alexander, op. cit., p. 198.

<sup>8</sup> *Collected Writings of John Murray: Systematic Theology II* (Banner of Truth Trust, 1977), p. 278.

<sup>9</sup> Alexander, op. cit., p. 202.

<sup>10</sup> At the turn of the century, B. B. Warfield warned that the word *redemption* was about to undergo vericide. “You see, what we are doing today as we look out upon our current religious modes of speech, is assisting at the deathbed of a word. It is sad to witness the death of any worthy thing – even of a worthy word. And worthy words do die, like any other worthy thing – if we do not take good care of them. How many worthy words have already died under our very eyes because we did not take care of them!” *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield II* (rpt. Baker Book House, 1981), p. 394. Warfield was inclined in his day to this opinion because “men who have ceased to think of the work of Christ in terms of purchasing, and to whom the whole conception of His giving His life for us as a ransom, or of His pouring out His blood as a price paid for our sins, has become abhorrent, feel little difficulty, therefore, in still speaking of Him as our Redeemer, and of His work as a Redemption, and of the Christianity which He founded as a Redemptive Religion,” (p. 387).

<sup>11</sup> *The Works of Jonathan Edwards II* (rpt. The Banner of Truth Trust, 1974), p. 3.