



BOASTING ABOUT JESUS

Part 4 of 1st Corinthians

Pastor Mark Driscoll | 1 Corinthians 1:18-31 | January 29, 2006

A brush of idealism paints the 1st-century church as a nostalgic example of community and perfection. The congregation in Corinth, however, was anything but ideal. Rather than sharing their possessions, the Corinthians would sue each other to get more stuff. Rather than eating meals together, the Corinthians would cut in line during communion to get drunk off the wine. And rather than communal singing, the Corinthians had communal sex. I'm A.J. Hamilton with Mars Hill Church in Seattle. In this sermon series, Pastor Mark Driscoll teaches on the letter known as 1 Corinthians, which the Apostle Paul wrote to untangle the many moral and theological knots the Corinthian church created.

In addressing their sin, Paul provides some of the richest theological sections of the entire New Testament. After listening to the following sermon, e-mail any questions or comments to feedback@marshillchurch.org. To automatically receive Mars Hill audio programming, subscribe to our podcast available at marshillchurch.org. And now, here's Pastor Mark with "Boasting About Jesus", the fourth sermon in a series, "Christians Gone Wild: 1 Corinthians."

Today what we're gonna talk about is what Christians believe and how that is perceived by others. Now, if you were like me you weren't a Christian as a kid. I became a Christian when I was 19 years of age, in college, and until that point I thought Christians were just some of the weirdest, freakiest nut jobs and social outcasts, and just the weirdest people I had ever met. Amen? Any of you – some of you are still non-Christians; you're like, "I know." And that is the general perception of Christians oftentimes by non-Christians, because the truth is Christians believe some whacky stuff, right?

Like I can still remember being in high school, I had a Christian – Christians were always trying to get me saved in high school. And one Christian came up and said, "You need to get saved!" "Okay, how do I get saved?" "You gotta believe in Jesus!" "Tell me about Jesus." "Oh, there's one God, and we sinned against him. And he became a human being. He was born of a virgin." I was like, "Oh, yeah, sure. There are a lot of virgin mothers." "And then he never sinned." I was like, "Okay, right." "And then he died on a cross for your sins, and three days later he rose and he performed miracles." "Okay, whatever. Well, how do I know I'm a sinner?"

"Well, this guy went up to the mountain and God wrote ten things on big rocks, and you've done them, so you're evil." You know, this is all getting a little whacky. I don't do drugs like other people – this doesn't make any sense to me. This doesn't – this just – and you gotta admit, how many of you have caught yourself as Christians telling what you believe, and halfway into it going, "Man, I sound crazy. I just sound crazy. I sound like a total whack job is what I sound like right now." And I remember avoiding Christians at all costs in high school because I thought they were just nuts.

And I got roped into one youth group meeting in all of high school, and the evangelical Christians tricked me. I'll tell you how they did it. I avoided them at all costs, and you could always tell, because they always had the shirts and the bracelets. They had the whole gear going on. This one time, though, they were tricky, these Christians. I got this call from this pretty hot girl – I wasn't a Christians, so preface it with that. But this hot girl called, and this doesn't – this didn't happen a lot. It doesn't happen other than my wife calls now. But at the time, no hot girls ever called me and this hot girl called me.

"Mark, hi; how are you doing?" "Better. Hi." "Marky, what are you doing tonight?" "Nothing." Hot girl calls, you're free, whatever you're doing – quit your job, whatever.

"Why, you got something in mind?" "Oh, yeah; I have something great planned for us tonight. You'll love it. We'll have a lot of fun. Could you pick me up? Let's go out." "Oh, yeah, totally – yeah." So I get dressed, and I go to pick up the hot girl. And her brother, who's a total geek, opens the door carrying a huge Bible, wearing some sort of Jesus sweat shirt. And I said, "Is your sister here?" "Oh, yeah, yeah – she's coming too."

There's two things a non-Christian guy doesn't want on a date with a hot girl, and that would be a brother, and the brother's Bible, right? So this dude's got his Bible, and I walk out to the car and she follows and he follows. I open the front door, he opens the back door. She gets in the back, and he gets in the back. And I'm sitting there like, "What the heck? This is the worst date I'm ever gonna go on." And so I get in the car. I say, "Well, what exactly are we doing?" They say, "Oh, you're gonna go to youth group." "No, I am not going to youth group. I have strategically avoided youth group successfully through half of my high school life – I'm not going."

He said, "No, you have to go. It's a scavenger hunt, and you're worth a lot of points." All right? How many of you went to this youth group, right? I hate you people. I said, "What do you mean?" He said, "Well, the cool kids won't go to youth group, so every year they make a list of the cool kids and they're each worth different points – and you're worth a lot of points." I said, "Did you pimp your sister out to get me to go to youth group?" This is terrible. And I said, "Look, I am not going." I said, "Why did you call me? Why did I have to come pick you up?" He said, "Because I don't have a

license.”

I said, “You gotta be kidding me.” I said, “Well, here’s the deal: I’ll drop you off at youth group. You can get your crazy points, but I’m not going to youth group.” And I start backing out, and he opens the door and says, “Wait a minute – I forgot the list. There’s a bunch of other people that are worth points too, and you gotta pick them up too.” “The last thing I’m doing is driving around to pick up people to get you points for youth group so you can win some Michael W. Smith CD as if it were some great accomplishment.” And he opens the door; he says, “No, I’ll just run in and get him.”

I said, “I’m not stopping this car. Don’t get out of the car.” He gets out, and I ran him over. One dude laughs like, “Yeah!” I told him I wasn’t gonna stop, and so he put his foot down, tripped – probably because of this big Bible that was in his way; it was his fault. And he tripped, and I ran his ankle over. And his ankle like a puffer fish just goes like this immediately – jacked up his ankle, ran over it with the car. Come on. So then he’s like, “Oh, you have to drive now, and you have to go to youth group!” Oh, man, this just couldn’t go any worse.

So he hobbles in, gets his list – next thing I know I’m driving around with a hot girl, her goofy brother, his Bible, picking up all kinds of other people. Driving around, go to youth group, get there. I think, “Okay, fine, I ran the guy over. The least I can do is go to youth group.” Get into youth group. We start off with a rousing competition of who can get the most marshmallows in their mouth and say ridiculous words – which was – it was an amazing athletic feat. And then they had to answer questions and if they got them wrong they had to sit on the whoopee cushion, which was just mature and academically satisfying in every way.

And this was just the most painful thing I have ever experienced in my whole life. I just hated it so bad. Never went to youth group again; stayed away. They didn’t really want me. They’re like, “He runs you over if you try to lead him to Jesus.” So then I make it into college, and the first thing you hit college they’re all running around with clipboards. “Would you like to know Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior?” “No. No. That’s why I didn’t go to the Christian college. You guys are supposed to be there. You’re not supposed to be over here bugging us. They have places for you, you know; they quarantine you guys to leave us alone. Go to the Christian college – leave me alone.”

And you know, you’re in the bathroom and dudes are leaving tracts. Literally I’m sitting down one time and a tract comes under the door. I don’t know who left it – a tract comes under the door. I’m like, “Dude, I do not want a tract!” I’m like, “Leave me alone!” The tract: What do you want in hell? That was the tract. Do you want water in hell? There’s no water in hell. I’m reading this thing. You want friends? There’s no friends in hell. I was like, “Well, there’ll be no tracts in hell – it’s not so bad!” And the Christians are always trying to save you and drive you nuts, and drove me crazy.

And I remember looking at all the religions and the philosophies in college trying to figure out what I thought about all this stuff. And I remember I finally met one Christian that I didn’t think was just a total freak, and he was my philosophy professor. The guy was brilliant; graduated from college like in his teens. Had like a Masters in math, had a PhD in philosophy – I think it was from Vanderbilt. His wife had a PhD in like women’s studies or English from Vanderbilt. These people were like spooky smart.

He’s in his 20s, full prof – full prof in his 20s. We had guys in the class that were like nine-year freshman because they drank a lot in the frat, and they’re like older than the prof, you know? And he was a really smart guy. And I remember in the middle of class some time somebody made a quirk about Jesus. He said, “Wait – we’re gonna be respectful in this class because I am a Christian.” I was like, “Whoa! You can read and zip your pants up!” I had never seen this.

So I remember meeting with the guy saying, “Okay, tell me really – you must have like some sort of philosophical, cool, academic, hip, like Vichenstein Jesus going on – something cool.” And he said, “No. I believe the Bible. We’re sinners. Jesus is God – lived a life without sin, died for our sin, rose from death. He’s the Way, the Truth and the Life.” I was like, “Come on, you have a PhD in philosophy.” He’s like, “I know, but I love Jesus.” And that just threw me – it stunned me because I had never met somebody who actually I thought was fairly smart and loved Jesus. Got me thinking; got me reading.

So I come to him and I say, “Okay, what about the miracles? Walking on water, virgin has a baby, little boy’s lunch feeds a multitude – this is crazy, right?” He says, “Well, here, read the British author Hume, Against Miracles. Read C.S. Lewis on miracles.” And every time I had a question he’d give me both sides of the argument from the philosophers, and I’d read. And eventually it came down to it, and I decided that I really did believe the Bible and I really did believe in Jesus and I really did believe in his death and his burial and his resurrection.

But then I was kind of freaked out to go to church, right? How many of you had this experience? You’re like, “Man, am I gonna get a uniform? Are they gonna give me one of those freaky shirts? Do I gotta wear a bracelet?” Like, you know, “Do I gotta put bumper stickers on my car? Do I need to throw out my music?” I mean all these things, you’re like, “Okay, I like Jesus, but I don’t know if I wanna hang out on his team with all the other kids in the family of God.” And to be honest with you there is a lot of pressure, is there not?

If you’re thinking about being a Christian there’s a lot of people going, “Man, that’s just crazy.” Once you become a Christian there’s even a little pressure to not really talk about it too much, or to sort of sand the edges off it so that you don’t sound so nuts. The result is you still want to be hip and cool and respectable and not have anybody think bad of you and have everybody still think you’re smart and cool. And the Corinthian church was struggling with this same thing. They’re a young, hip, urban, cool church filled with a lot of cool people. And they were struggling between being cool and being with Christ, and they were struggling between what other people thought and what God thought.

And the truth is that this is a perennial problem even in our own church and even in our own day. How you are perceived by others sometimes can make you feel uncomfortable, and the question is how do you respond to that as a Christian – if you are a Christian? There’s some of you may be resisting becoming Christians just by virtue of the fact that you don’t want everybody to think you’re a total freak. So you’re trying to find a way to go to Heaven and still be cool? Is that even possible?

Martin Luther broke this section of 1 Corinthians down that we'll be getting into that addresses this problem into two categories. He called it a theology of glory and a theology of the cross. And the theology of glory, everybody just wants to be rich and cool and beautiful and successful and powerful, and they want God to make them achieve their ends and be all they can be. And God's like the best self-help seminar ever – he'll make you a winner! And that's all the junk that gets sold as Christianity today.

The other he says is a theology of the cross where you say, "You know what? Jesus wasn't hip. Jesus wasn't cool. Jesus wasn't rich. Jesus wasn't powerful. Jesus was simple, humble; he got executed, he died; he suffered." God didn't come to us in the way that any of us would've expected, and God doesn't look like the person that we all want to be. And so we're left with a choice: do we go with the real Jesus, or the one that we really want? And so Paul starts answering all of these kinds of questions in 1 Corinthians 1:18 – let me get a sip of water.

He says, "The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written" – quotes the Old Testament – "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate." Not very smart; I can't even say "intelligent." That tells you what team I'm on. What he says is this: when it comes to the cross, the most important event in all of human history – literally the crux of all that we believe.

That's where God revealed himself, died for our sins, demonstrated his holiness and his love, his wrath and his mercy. That is where God conquered Satan, sin, death, hell, demons, difficulty – through the cross. That is where eternal life is given and promised. It's such a major issue that we recently spent three months together just looking at the implications of Jesus' death on the cross. And Paul says when you come to the cross some people find that to be crazy talk.

"What, God was born of a virgin? Spent the 30 years of his life working a job? Then three years of miracles and then died to take away the sins of the world because he himself never sinned? This is crazy talk – you people are nuts!" For Christians, they look at it and they say, "No, that's the most glorious, wonderful, beautiful event in all of human history. There's my God being humble, being loving, being selfless, being sacrificial – giving himself. It is glorious, wonderful and good."

And so when it comes to the cross there are two distinct perspectives: those who love that Jesus and those who just don't get it. And the reason that some don't get it, it says in Romans 1, is that they are unwilling because they suppress the truth in unrighteousness. They don't want to hear that God is humble because they don't want to be humble. They don't want to hear that God is sinless because they don't want to stop sinning. They don't want to hear that God is loving because they don't love anyone but themselves. And so they resist the truth.

It says in 1 Corinthians 2 that we'll be looking at here in the next few weeks that they are also unable to enjoy the cross, to delight in Jesus, and to see the truth because it is only through the Holy Spirit enabling someone to see Jesus for who he is. Our humble, sacrificial, giving, loving God wrapping victory in what first appears to be an absolutely horrendous defeat. But those who have the Holy Spirit – those who God has opened their eyes and opened their heart and opened their mind – they see Jesus in an entirely different light.

And for those of you that are Christians, maybe you had the same experience that I did. I thought Christianity was quite frankly nuts. I started reading the Bible in college. Reading lots of philosophers, religions. I thought Christianity was nuts. I thought the whole concept of Jesus being God, taking away sin, the only way to eternal life – I thought that was nuts. And then one day – I can't even explain it to you; it just happened – God, the Holy Spirit, just changed my mind and changed my heart. I can't fully explain that.

All of a sudden it was like, "I get it now! Oh, Jesus – I love Jesus!" I just remember seeing Jesus totally differently. What this means is that for those of you who have friends and family and coworkers that are not Christian, it's not because they're stupid. It's because they're blind. It's not because you have not done a good job of pointing it out. It doesn't matter how well you point it out. If they can't see, they can't see him to whom you are pointing. So we need not get mad and angry and frustrated when people don't understand our Jesus.

We need to love them, be patient, pray for them, that God would open their eyes. And we should ask questions and help to answer their questions and seek to bring them in a continuum of relationship towards Jesus. But ultimately too, we shouldn't take it personally when they think we're totally nuts. I mean I'll be honest with you – if you're honest you'll have to say that there are times as a Christian that you wonder if you're not nuts, right? I do. I get up here and preach for a living, and sometimes halfway through I'm like, "Golly – that sounds crazy right there."

But it's true and I believe it. But there are times that I'm going, "People are gonna think I'm nuts here." I mean you think about it. Imagine if the story of Christianity was translated into our modern day, right? Somebody knocks on your door. (Knocking) "Yes, hello." "Hello – I'm here to tell you about God." "Oh, well, thank you. Tell me about God." "Well, God was born in Kent to a 16-year-old virgin from Kent Meridian High School." You're like, "Come on; there's no virgins at Kent Meridian High School. That's a lie. That's a lie."

That was a good line, and I'm still gonna use it the rest of the day. So – "And the virgin girl was camping, and she gave birth to God in a tent. And he never really made it to college; never travelled to a big city, never wrote a book, because he was really busy working at Les Schwab." You'd be like, "What the pig – God was working at Les Schwab?" "Oh yeah – he could get rims on and off like nobody. He was amazing. And then he started doing miracles. He walked across Lake Washington. He took a Dick's hamburger and fries and he fed a whole Seahawks game."

"And then yeah, yeah, this other guy was dead and he brought him back. You know, it was cool. Kurt Cobain, and he brought him back – it was really cool. And then he died – they electrocuted him in a chair in Texas because that's the only place they'll do that. They put him in an electric chair and killed him, and three days later he came back and he's God. Do you wanna join?" You'd be like, "I smoke a lot of weed, and that still doesn't make any

sense to me. That sounds crazy. Here you need some – you need help.”

It sounds crazy, right? I mean but that’s exactly what we believe. That’s exactly what I believe. And I’m telling you and I’m thinking, “They’re gonna think I’m nuts.” And that’s what happens, that the truth is not what any of us would have expected. And God comes in this unexpected way, does unexpected things, and just shocks us all by being totally different than what we would’ve anticipated. So the church is wrestling – the Corinthian church is wrestling with, “Do we really go with this? I mean we love Jesus, but people are gonna think we’re crazy.”

So Paul continues in verse 20: “Well, where is the wise man?” Right? Where’s the guy with more degrees than Fahrenheit who knows how to write a footnote? “Where’s the scholar?” Where’s the guy who’s published his insights? “Where is the philosopher of this age?” The person who can not only spell Vichenstein and Kierkegaard, but actually can tell you what in the world they were talking about. “Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world?”

“For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe. Jews demand miraculous signs” – it’s all about the power. “Greeks look for wisdom” – cogent syllogisms. “But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Greeks, but to those whom God has called,” – the ones whom God has chosen – “both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.”

Here’s what he’s saying: people want to determine the means by which they will come to their conclusions about God, and that’s unacceptable. Some say that God can only be known through speculation of philosophy and religion. Paul says that’s not how God is to be made known. Those who expect God to come to them in a philosophical way share the mindset of the Greeks, who were descendants of Socrates and Plato and Aristotle, and that is the great lineage of Western philosophy.

And those who have that mentality say, “God, if you were real, then you must answer all my questions; all my philosophical inquiry. You must meet all of my mental demands. Not only must you answer all my questions, you must answer them in a way that I deem sufficient, and I must like the answers.” That’s an arrogance. That’s sitting on a throne saying, “God, I am Alex Trebek. You come and see if you can answer my questions.” If ~~Right?~~ academic form of playing the game Jeopardy is what it is. “I’m the host, and you are here to answer my questions.”

And Paul says we can’t come to God with that kind of arrogance pointing our fingers saying, “You work for me and you answer to me.” That was the Greek problem. The Jewish problem was they demanded power and miracle and signs. They wanted God to come and crush their enemies and liberate them and set up a nation and just absolutely do good for them and bless them and make their life exactly what they wanted.

And if you were looking at it saying, “I will worship you, God, when you make me healthy or happy or when you heal my cancer or when you fill my bank account or when you cause my life to be what I decide is what I deserve,” Paul’s saying that in and of itself is a relationship that God will not enter into because you have presupposed that you are God and that God is your servant and that God does what you tell him. And God doesn’t have relationships where he is under anyone; where he is the one whom is commanded to do things and must obey them.

Now, it is true that God is humble and does serve, but not in a way that we become like little gods telling him what to do. And so if you’re here today and you say, “I’m not a Christian because I haven’t seen enough miracles, and my prayers have not been answered,” or “I’m not a Christian because my questions have not all been answered to my sufficient liking,” Paul is saying, “Then you have started your investigation of Jesus at the wrong place.”

Don’t start with the speculation of the philosophers and the religious leaders. Start with the revelation of the cross of Jesus Christ. You start at the cross and you ask, “What does this tell me about God? What does this tell me about me? What does this tell me about the purpose of life? Maybe it’s not all about glory. Maybe it’s not about just being rich and powerful and successful and famous if this is the perfect human being. Maybe it’s not about me always getting my way. Maybe it’s not about me getting all my questions answered.”

Because on the cross Jesus says, “Why have you forsaken me?” Jesus is suffering. Jesus is humble. Jesus is dying. Jesus is outcast. Jesus is shamed. What Luther calls the theology of glory gets absolutely destroyed at the cross. And in coming to the cross all of our preconceptions of who God is and what God should do for us are absolutely destroyed. And so you have two choices: you either begin with human speculation or you begin with divine revelation. You either begin with someone, somewhere other than the cross, or you begin with Jesus dying for your sins.

And those are the only two means by which you can seek to come to a knowledge of God. One, the cross, will get you to the truth. The other will get you into varying kinds of philosophical and religious error. That’s why this is so important. That’s why this is so important. And I’m not saying this: I’m not saying that we are opposed to scholarship. What we are saying is that scholarship should lead to Jesus; that the truth should lead to Jesus. The truth in any discipline should lead to Jesus.

Sociology should lead to Jesus. Psychology should lead to Jesus. History should lead to Jesus. Philosophy should lead to Jesus. Whatever your discipline, it has to be integrated with Scripture, and it has to connect to Jesus. We’re not saying don’t read; we’re saying read and love Jesus. We’re not saying don’t study; we’re saying study and love Jesus. We’re not saying don’t be educated; we’re saying be educated and love Jesus. That’s what we’re saying.

What Paul is not denigrating is philosophers and scholars and students. He is denigrating philosophers, scholars and students who use the mind that God gave them to argue against the God who made them. Using the logic and reasoning capacity that God has enabled them to have that he doesn’t exist or is someone other than Jesus. It’s a wrong use of the gifts that God has given.

That's why I remember being in college talking to this philosophy prof – a brilliant guy who deeply loved Jesus. Wife – brilliant lady who deeply loved Jesus. And I remember sitting down with him. I said, "How can you be a philosopher, a philosophy professor, and a Bible-believing Jesus-loving Christian?" He said, "I believe that all thinking shows both the depth of human sin and the goodness and truthfulness of Scripture." He said, "So I look at everything through Scripture. I take everything to Jesus."

I said, "You got a PhD doing that?" "Absolutely." I said, "How do you be a prof at this school?" He said, "It's hard sometimes. A lot of people laugh at me." I mean imagine being a philosophy professor in a state college who deeply loved Jesus. Somebody's gonna make fun of you. But he said, "You know, I know Jesus and I know that they don't, and I'm praying that they would come to know Jesus." He didn't get all defensive and take it personal. He understood that they just didn't see it, and so his hope was to pray for them and serve them and answer their questions in an effort to help them see Jesus as he sees Jesus – the God who loved him so much as to die on a cross and take away his sins.

The Christians in Corinth are struggling to come to this place. They still want to be cool. They want to be powerful. They want to be rich. They want to be beautiful. They want to be famous. So Paul says to them in verse 26: "Brothers, think of what you were when you were called." How many of you right now if I said, "Come on up and tell me about what you were like before you became a Christian" – most of you wouldn't want to do it. You would say things like, "Well, I used to struggle with some stuff," and that's as much as we would get out of you, right?

You wouldn't bring the photos. You wouldn't bring the rehab slip. You wouldn't bring any of that stuff. Paul says think back when you were not a Christian. Some of you became Christians young in life, so maybe this is hard. These people all became Christians later in life, as I did. I became a Christian at age 19. Think back to when you were a non-Christian. "Not many of you were wise by human standards." You guys weren't that smart, right?

"Not many of you were influential." Nobody would listen to you – that's why you're always frustrated. "Not many of you were of noble birth." You didn't have a great dad. Some of you didn't have a dad. Some of you had a dad but you wish you'd never known him. "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world, the despised things – and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are."

What he's saying is this: when you become a Christian God does wonderful things to fix you and change you and to mature you. The result is you feel like you're doing better. You feel like, "You know, I'm not the same person that I used to be. Life's going better. I'm doing better. I feel good." But then you could get all arrogant and fool yourself and say, "Well, it's no wonder God chose me to be on his team! I'm a first-round draft choice – look at me! I'm hot. I'm smart. I'm rich. I'm famous. I'm powerful."

He's saying you weren't. You were jack squat nobody – that's who you were. You were nobody. You were just a regular common person. Now, when God does something the question is should we get really proud about that, or should we maintain humility? Because here's the problem – the problem is always this: that sometimes Christians – because they think they're on the winning team, right? "Our God beat Satan. We're going to Heaven. We're the winners." They think that makes them a winner.

There's a lot of Christians that are losers. They just happen to be on the winning team, but they themselves are not personally brilliant. Just because you're a Christian doesn't mean you're smart. Just because you're a Christian doesn't mean you're cool, doesn't mean you're hip, doesn't mean you're beautiful, doesn't mean you're insightful. It just means you're loved by God, that's all. And you think back on it, right, most of us – and what he's not saying is that all Christians are poor and dumb. Just most, right – just most.

Occasionally we get a cool person, like, "Hey, Bono's on our team!" Like, "Great – we have one." You know, and sometimes a rich person will love Jesus. And sometimes a hot person will love Jesus. And sometimes an insightful person will love Jesus. But like they could have a convention in a phone booth – there's not a ton of them, right? Most of us are just driving beater cars, eating hamburgers and sleeping in past our alarm. We're really not that profoundly impressive human beings.

But sometimes when God starts to do things in our lives we think that we're wonderful and we forget that the only reason that things have changed is because of Jesus, not because of us. And we get all full of ourselves and proud, and we get defensive when other people say that we're foolish. And the truth he's saying is this: if Christianity is for the rich and the powerful and the hot and the influential, then it really doesn't work for most people, does it? It's like one of those celebrity religions in L.A. you gotta pay to get into. And unless you're really hot and really smart and can write fat checks, you can't make it.

I'll give you guys a story. I grew up mainly around SeaTac, but before that when I was real little we lived in a neighborhood closer to White Center. And we always used to play football, me and all the other kids. We'd go out in the street because we didn't have big yards, and we'd play football. And I was a quarterback and there was another kid who was a quarterback. And then you know how it would be: all the kids would line up and they'd all want to get picked for the team, and nobody wanted to get picked when? Last – never want to get picked last.

Well, the same kid was always picked last. This kid – he came from a troubled home. He only had two pair of pants, and even though he was like ten years old he'd wet them all the time. So his mom wouldn't let him change his pants, so he always smelled like urine. Always wore a dirty white T-shirt – he only had a couple. I mean it's a sad story. The kid one day was playing with a lighter in the house. Lit himself on fire and his mom was afraid he'd burn the house down, so she kicked him out. I mean the kid ended up in the hospital with burns all over his body.

I mean the kid really had some significant troubles in his life. He was underprivileged. He just had a hard time. And he always wanted to play football with us, but man, he was not the kid you'd pick for your team, because you would never throw the ball to him and then he would yell at you. And if you threw it to him it would always hit him in the face, and then he'd really yell at you for hitting him in the face with a ball. And then you'd try to tell

him, "Look, when I throw it to you catch it. Don't let it hit you. Or open your mouth, you know. Just get it to stick to your person somehow. That's the goal of the game." He'd be like, "Throw it! Throw it! Throw it! What'd you do that for?"

This guy on my team is just – we're not gonna win. So we actually never picked this guy. We'd pick both teams, and then we'd break and he'd still be standing there. Never got – and then he'd sort of just wander over and join in on one of the teams, and nobody would ever throw the ball to him. Well, there was one day I went to pick the teams and he got right up in the front of all the other kids. And he was yelling, "Pick me! Pick me! Pick me!" And I was like, "Oh man!" I'm trying not to make eye contact with him, so I'm looking over here and I'm looking at the ground and I'm looking over here trying not to make eye contact.

And I finally decided I'm gonna pick him. I'm gonna pick him first. So I said, "Okay, I'll take so-and-so," and I picked him. And he just was so happy he almost wet himself. The kid was just freaking out, he was so happy. And so he was first-round draft choice, and the whole day was spent me throwing the ball and it bouncing off his head. But what Paul is saying is that when God picks his team this is kind of what it's like for him, and we're the kid that smells like urine.

And isn't it weird that if that – let's say that day the team that I was quarterbacking – I don't know – if that team won. Wouldn't it be unbelievable if this kid was running around saying, "I crushed you! I defeated you! I'm better than you! I'm a first-round draft choice!" Wouldn't Terrell Owens and all the other kids in the neighborhood – wouldn't that seem peculiar? Like that kid – reality is in the distant mirror for this kid, you know? "He really thinks that he's a winner. He really thinks that he won. He really thinks that he's the best."

And the truth is that when God looks down in human history to pick his team, as it were – to elect and predetermine, choose, call, all these words – he's looking down going, "You know, there's really not any first-round draft choices here. And I know oo, you have a blog, whoo, and oo, look at you, you have a job, and oo, and look at you! Your person, your shoes totally match – wow!" God is not impressed with us. Now, we're impressed with ourselves, and there's some other people maybe we're a little impressed with them. But God's not impressed.

God looks down and says, "I made the universe, and you made a sandwich. I can get stuff done without you. I don't need you to be on my team, but I'll choose you for my team because I love you." And sometimes God chooses a rich person and sometimes a poor person, and sometimes a smart person and sometimes a simple person, and sometimes a young person, old person, black person, white person. God chooses all kinds of people for his team.

But what happens is that sometimes Christians get real arrogant thinking, "I'm on the winning team. That makes me a winner, and I'm better than everybody else because we crush them, because I belong to Jesus." And Paul's saying, "Remember what it was like before God picked you for his team." He didn't pick you because you were a winner. He picked you because he loves you. He picked you in spite of yourself. I can still remember me being just a regular guy in college before I was a Christian. Just trying to figure out what I was gonna major in; flat broke, eating a bunch of pizza – just a regular guy.

Why did God pick me? No reason. Just that he's nice – that's all. That's what grace is. So it's important for us as a church because some of you, you are doing better, right? You've stopped whatever addiction or sin, and you know you're growing up. And you're getting your degree or your job or your spouse or your kids or your house. Or you're reading books, you're developing theologically, you feel like you're making progress. We say praise be to God – just don't boast, and don't get all arrogant and proud and self-righteous saying, "Now I'm a total winner, and I'm all about victorious Christianity for winners like me!"

Paul says look back at where you were when God chose you and the work that God has done since then. And then he goes on to talk about this a little further in verse 29 – "so that no one may boast before him." See, when we're boasting God hears that, and isn't it a sick thing to boast in the presence of God? "God, look what I did! Look at who I am!" God's like, "Wait a second. If you're smart, it's because I gave you that mind. If you're hot, it's because I gave you that body. If you're loved, it's because I gave you those people. If you're employed, it's because I gave you that job."

"If you're a spouse, it's because I gave you that spouse. If you're a parent, it's because I gave you those kids. Don't stand before me and say, 'Look what I did!'" God's like, "Wait a minute. You think that you are the master of your fate, the captain of your destiny, and the creator of your own future? That's not true." It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus. It's because of God that we are in Christ and have the benefits of being in Christ. See, I don't believe that I chose God. I believe that God chose me.

I don't believe that I saved myself. I believe God saved me. I don't believe that God looked down and chose me because I was a great person to be on his team. I believe God looked down and had mercy and pity on me, and said, "Mark desperately needs me. I'm gonna save him in spite of himself." It's because of him, not because of us. And then Jesus has become for us, he says, "wisdom from God – that is our righteousness, holiness and redemption. Therefore, as it is written" – he quotes the Old Testament – "'Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.'"

Okay. Some Christians boast about the wrong things. Some Christians don't boast at all. What Paul is gonna push his people toward is a humble confidence. The first thing he's saying is this: first of all, don't be ashamed of Jesus. Don't be ashamed of his crucifixion, his cross. Don't be ashamed of your Bible. Don't be ashamed of the truth. Don't be ashamed. So many Christians, they feel ashamed about Jesus and what they believe so they do one of two things: 1) they change what they believe to accommodate people so that people won't think that they're crazy or foolish, or 2) they just don't answer any of the hard questions so that nobody thinks they're crazy or foolish.

Either way, they're ashamed of what Jesus has done for them, and they're ashamed of the truth. I'll give you an example – and this is not just to pick on people. But the largest church in America, the pastor last year got on Larry King, right? Big opportunity – gets on Larry King. Larry King asks, "So there's lots of religions. Everybody's got their own view. Do you think, Mr. Pastor, that you need Jesus Christ to go to Heaven and not hell?" That was

his question. Larry King, all right? This is it, right?

This is softball. Your dad's pitching. The ball's over the middle of the plate. You gotta wind up, and you gotta take this one home. Here's what he says: "Well, I don't know if I believe that the other religions are wrong. I believe here's what the Bible teaches, and from the Christian faith this is what I believe. But I think that only God can judge a person's heart. I spent a lot of time in India with my father. I don't know all about the religion, but I know they love God. And I don't know – I've seen their sincerity, so I don't know."

It's like, "Dude, you're on Larry King!" Right? "Larry's an old man; he could die any time. You gotta get this right!" See, you know, Larry says, "Do you need Jesus to go to heaven?" You gotta say, "I'm not ashamed of Jesus. Yes. Jesus said, 'I am the Way, the Truth and the Life. No one comes to the Father but by me.' Jesus said he's the only way to Heaven. I know that sounds crazy. I know there's nice people that do good things and have lots of religions. I know you're gonna think I'm a total whack job wing nut. But here's the deal: yeah, you need Jesus. That's the deal."

That's the answer. But what does he say? "I don't know. I don't know. I don't know." It's like, "Dude, you're the mailman – no opening the mail. No editing the mail. No changing the mail. Just deliver the mail!" And later on the pastor said, "Well, I didn't do such a good job." You think? You think, Charlie Brown, you didn't get your foot on the ball? You think perhaps? But the truth is, don't we all do this all the time? Your mom comes, "You're not one of those born-againer Jesus freaks, are you?" "Nah." Right?

Your coworker says, "I hate those Christians. They all – you're not a Christian are you?" "No, no, no." See, we all do this at varying times, to varying degrees, varying ways, including even Jesus' right-hand guy Peter. So we all do this. But Paul says don't be ashamed. Boast in Jesus. Feel free to be honest about Jesus. The other way that we're ashamed of Jesus is either we answer the question wrong – we say, "I know you don't like the answer so I'll change it." The second way we mess it up is we just don't answer any questions because we're ashamed of Jesus.

Again, Time magazine did an article – feature story, cover story on the most powerful evangelicals in America. They quote one of the pastors: "What do you think? Do you think that homosexuality is right or wrong? What is your answer?" Here's what he says: "You know what, the thing that breaks my heart is that there's no way I can answer it without hurting someone on either side." Which is "I'm not gonna answer the question." You gotta answer the question. Now, you don't need to be a mean jerk. You don't need to pick on a people group. You don't need to be a bigot.

But if somebody asks a question you need to answer the question. He says, "Well, I don't want to answer the question because somebody would get their feelings hurt." Well, God just got his feelings hurt because you didn't answer the question. So if somebody's gonna get their feelings hurt whether or not you answer the question, I just hope it wouldn't be God who's the one who gets his feelings hurt. Oh, people over here and people over here. Well, what about the guy up there? What about his feelings?

See, the first thing Paul is saying is don't be ashamed, because if you're ashamed you'll change the answer or you won't even answer the question, and that's not acceptable. And you don't answer it, or you answer differently knowing, "They're gonna think I'm crazy." I get this all the time. People come up, "Do you really believe the Bible?" "I do." "You're nuts." "You know, I love you – you want one? You can read it." I'm not angry, I'm not mad, it's just, "Look, yeah. I love the Bible. I like Jesus. This is where I'm at."

Right? We're nice pluralistic, tolerant, multi-ethnic, multi-cultural, multi-perspectival culture – just I'm into Jesus, you know? Don't judge me, narrow-minded Liberal! And then what Paul also says is we shouldn't be ashamed of Jesus but we also shouldn't be proud of ourselves, because this is what happens. Christians say, "Well, you know, all you non-Christians think we're crazy. All you non-Christians mock us because we talk about Jesus. All you non-Christians don't believe that you should obey the Bible. You think you can do whatever you want, have sex with whoever you want, do whatever you want. Well, we're smart and we're powerful.

"We're on God's side. We're gonna win this culture war. We're gonna crush our enemies. This is a Christian country. We're taking it back. Don't you know who we are? We're the chosen. We're the winners!" It's like, "Yeah, boy!" And these are the two teams: The "I'll give you another answer or I won't answer the question" or "I'll tell you that you're the bad guy, I'm the good guy, and Jesus sent me here to crush you. And I'm gonna boast in myself – I'm powerful! God's on my side, and we're here to win!"

Paul says don't be ashamed of Jesus, and don't be proud of yourself. Be proud – so keep the pride – of Jesus. Be proud of Jesus. Boast in Jesus. That's what he says. I love it, how he says it: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord." Right? That's humble confidence – confidence in the power of Jesus; humility knowing that I'm no better than anybody else. Somebody comes up, "Well, you Christians think you're better than everybody." "No, we're not. No, we're not. We're perverts, nut jobs, weirdoes, freaks, thieves, hypocrites, liars, gluttons evildoers, and you'd fit right in. You wanna join?"

We're not better than anybody. We're sinners. If at any point Christians forget that we are sinners, that we're saved by grace, that it's a gift of God, not in ourselves, so that no one can boast, we lose sight of the cross. We lose sight of Jesus. We lose sight of the point. And we either take it personally and don't want to offend anybody, or we take it personally and want to defend ourselves. And meanwhile Jesus is not the conversation that's being had. He's not the focus of attention of people who claim to be Christian. And he's not the topic being introduced to those who are not yet Christian.

This is a concern that I have for us as a church. As we get bigger, as you all get married and make babies and make money and run companies and we become more and more of a force, the tendency could be to either drift toward compromise saying, "Well, we'll just sort of get rid of the rough edges of what we believe so that we're more acceptable." Or it could be an overreaction – we're just arrogant, telling the city what to do, pointing our finger at people who don't know God. And they can't understand because they don't see, and they won't see till the Holy Spirit does a miracle, and we're not here to crush them.

We're here to pray for them, love them, answer questions, patiently walk with them, and introduce them to Jesus. And that's between them and Jesus whether or not they're saved, because he saves people, we don't. But he uses people like us to introduce people to him, so we're part of his plan. This is a huge lesson for us all, because the better your life goes by God's grace, the greater propensity there is for you to take credit for it instead of thanking Jesus.

So if you overcome sin, say, "You know what? I've overcome sin – thank you, Jesus!" If you fall in love and get married, you say, "I've been married – thank you, Jesus!" I become a parent – "Thank you, Jesus!" I got a job – "Thank you, Jesus!" I graduated from college – "Thank you, Jesus!" I'm learning the Bible and I'm reading good books, and I say, "Thank you, Jesus!" And I'm able to pay off my debts. I'm able to tithe and serve and do ministry or help others or participate in the lives of other people in significant ways. And I don't boast – I say, "Thank you, Jesus!"

And I boast in Jesus, and when people come up and they say, "Boy, that was incredible!" I say, "Yeah, you should've seen me before I met Jesus." It didn't look like this. He's been so good to me. He's been so faithful to me. He's been so gracious to me. He's taken away my sin at the cross. He's taken away my shame and disgrace at the cross. He's conquered my flesh and the world and the devil at the cross. He's given me new life at the cross. I know it sounds crazy, but I'm telling you: apart from Jesus, my life looks nothing like this. And I'm just so glad that he has been so good to me.

And I'm so glad that when he looks down and picks his team he picks people like me. It's shocking. It's scandalous – is literally the Greek word out of the section of 1 Corinthians. It's a scandal – it's an absolute scandal that God would pick the kinds of people to love and to serve and to forgive and to embrace and to transform that he does. But he does it because he gets the glory, and he gets the power, and he gets the honor, and we get the joy. It's not that there's nothing in it for us. There's plenty of joy.

That's what we get. He gets the glory, and we get lots of joy, and that is the message of the Christian faith. So today now we all give you an opportunity to respond. Some of you are not Christians. You've been too cool for Christ; too smart for Christ. You've been giving Jesus little orders that he has not yet met, so you haven't given yourself to him. Confess your sins. Give yourself to Jesus today in prayer. Ask him to forgive you and be your God. Some of you are Christians, but you've been really ashamed, right?

You have answered some questions totally wrong to maintain certain relationships. Some of you have ignored other questions altogether. Your friend comes up, "I'm sleeping with my girlfriend. Do you think that's wrong?" "Oh, well, I don't know. That's kind of debated. You know, the Seahawks are in the play-offs – you want to talk about that?" No – answer the question. "You're gonna fry like a Jimmy Dean pure pork sausage on a griddle. You'd better hustle and repent!" Answer the question.

Some of you, though, you've been hammered on, and people have made fun of you and opposed you, so you've gotten kind of arrogant, self-righteous, puffed up and proud. Like, "Well, I'm smart, and I'm" – let it pass. If they're not a Christian they don't understand. Don't take it personally. Keep the issue on Jesus. Some of you Christians need to repent of varying sins. When you're ready to partake of communion – for all of you who are Christians – just remembering the body and blood of Jesus shed for our sin.

It's our celebration of the cross. We give our tithes and offerings. If you're a visitor, a non-Christian, don't give. For the rest, it's part of our response to God. Then we'll sing and we'll celebrate, and we will use our time of worship to boast about Jesus, his person and work.

And so Lord Jesus, thank you for being our great God, our Savior, our King, our Lord, our Friend, our Intercessor, our Mediator, and our Helper. Jesus, it is our prayer that you would call us to yourself; that you would save us, that you would open our eyes, that you would change our hearts and minds. And that Jesus, when you do, that we wouldn't brag that we were chosen by grace for no reason that enables us to be proud; may we have confidence knowing that you are true and your Word is true.

May we have humility to know that it is not because of our power or wisdom or might that things get done in this world – it is by your grace. Jesus, as things go better in our lives and progress is made, may we give credit where credit is due; may we boast in you. Jesus, may we be a humble people who do not lose sight of the cross. There is pressure to change the message. There is pressure to ignore the questions. There is pressure to fight for our own glory instead of yours. May we avoid such things and not lose sight of you. We ask that you would enable this by the power of your Holy Spirit. Amen.

You've been listening to the Mars Hill Church sermon series "Christians Gone Wild: 1 Corinthians", taught by Pastor Mark Driscoll. If you have any questions or comments about this –