

# **Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians**

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# Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians



BRIGHAM YOUNG UNIVERSITY  
NEW TESTAMENT COMMENTARY

**Richard D. Draper**  
and  
**Michael D. Rhodes**

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# About the Brigham Young University New Testament Commentary Series

Welcome to the BYU New Testament Commentary, a project by a group of Latter-day Saint specialists offering to readers a careful, new look at the biblical records that witness the life and ministry of Jesus Christ and the first generation of his church. The commentary series seeks to make the New Testament more accessible to Latter-day Saint general readers and scholars by employing much of current biblical scholarship while reflecting important LDS insights. At the same time, this effort may also be helpful to interested readers of other faiths who want to learn how a group of Latter-day Saint scholars understands the Bible. A fundamental article of faith for Latter-day Saints (Mormons) affirms the Bible “to be the word of God” while adding, understandably, that it needs to be “translated correctly” in order for it to be accurately comprehensible to modern language speakers.

These objectives have helped shape the purposes and parameters of this commentary series. Serious LDS readers of the Bible search the scriptures, looking for depth and breadth in passages whose meanings and mandates may ultimately be plain but not shallow. Such readers and interpreters are served by treatments that unite faith and research, reason and revelation, in prayerfully confronting profound and difficult issues that arise in the texts and affect one’s path of progression. The New Testament has served as an influential guide to western civilization for centuries. As such, its records have long been studied by lay people and scholars alike, resulting in a rich reservoir of information that illuminates the New Testament era culturally, historically, and linguistically. Selectively, the BYUNTC builds upon this vast body of knowledge, resting on the Greek texts of the New Testament and connecting helpful elements of linguistic, literary, historical, and cultural research and traditional scholarship together with LDS scriptures and doctrinal perspectives. The combination of all these features distinguishes the BYUNTC from other commentaries, which are readily

available elsewhere and which readers may also want to consult for more encyclopedic or specialized discussions.

The tone of the BYUNTC aims to be informative rather than hortatory, and suggestive rather than definitive in its interpretation. The opinions expressed in this series are the views of its contributors and should not necessarily be attributed to The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints; Brigham Young University, where many of those involved here are headquartered; or anyone else, though these works have benefitted from input and guidance from a number of colleagues, advisors, editors, and peer reviewers.

Each volume in this series sets in two parallel columns the King James Version (KJV) and a new working translation of the New Testament. Calling this a new “rendition” clarifies that it does not seek to replace the authorized KJV adopted by the LDS Church as its official English text. Rather, it aims to enhance readers’ understanding conceptually and spiritually by rendering the Greek texts into modern English with LDS sensitivities in mind. Comparing and explaining the New Rendition in light of the KJV then serves as one important purpose for each volume’s notes, comments, analyses, and summaries. This effort responds in modest ways to the desire President J. Reuben Clark Jr. expressed in his diary in 1956, that someday “qualified scholars [would provide] . . . a translation of the New Testament that will give us an accurate translation that shall be pregnant with the great principles of the Restored Gospel.”

Depending on their personal skills and interests, the authors of these volumes approach their scholarly sources and LDS materials differently, but always with careful exposition and engaging perspectives. In several ways, they employ various interpretive tools, including semantic considerations of Greek vocabulary; cultural, historical, critical, literary, and structural analyses; and intertextual comparisons with other biblical passages, the Book of Mormon, and other scriptural works including the Joseph Smith Translation of the Bible. Observations are also proffered about the doctrinal and spiritual reception of New Testament teachings and practices in the broad LDS religious tradition.

The format also varies moderately from volume to volume regarding introductory materials and the style of commentary. Throughout, Greek and Hebrew terms appear in transliterated form in conformity with standards adopted by the Society of Biblical Literature. In some cases, a volume reproduces the Greek New Testament text, based on the Greek text published by the Society of Biblical Literature (2010) or draws upon the twenty-eighth edition of the Nestle-Aland text in *Novum Testamentum Graece* (2012).

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## GOD'S CHOICE OF THE FOOLISH (1:26–31)

Paul now begins his second argument, showing the folly of human wisdom and the astuteness of divine wisdom by turning to the condition in which the Corinthian Saints find themselves.<sup>272</sup> Because of their acceptance of Christ, they have been marginalized by the majority of the Corinthians, whether Jew or Greek. They have found themselves without influence or power. Paul shows them that the wisdom of men, which has led to this condition, is itself folly, for it will fail. The reason for the failure is the coming judgment of God, which will vindicate the Christians' faith and damn the faithlessness of the "wise." Paul, as one scholar noted, pushes his readers to see "the risks of human wisdom when it is exalted disproportionately to the detriment of the meaning of Christ and his cross. Wisdom, eloquence, and rhetoric may have their place in human life, but there is further consideration for Christians, whether they come from a Jewish or Gentile background, namely, the gospel or the message of the cross. Paul insists that all Christians must draw strength for human life and its endeavors from 'Christ crucified.'<sup>273</sup> The reason, as Paul clearly concludes, is that the Savior is the single source of our wisdom, our righteousness, our sanctification, and, ultimately, our redemption.

### Greek Text

26 Βλέπετε γὰρ τὴν κλήσιν ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί, ὅτι οὐ πολλοὶ σοφοὶ κατὰ σάρκα, οὐ πολλοὶ δυνατοί, οὐ πολλοὶ εὐγενεῖς· 27 ἀλλὰ τὰ μωρὰ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνη τοὺς σοφοὺς, καὶ τὰ ἀσθενῆ τοῦ κόσμου ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, ἵνα καταισχύνη τὰ ἰσχυρά, 28 καὶ τὰ ἀγενῆ τοῦ κόσμου καὶ τὰ ἐξουθενημένα ἐξελέξατο ὁ θεός, τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ, 29 ὅπως μὴ καυχῆσθαι πᾶσα σὰρξ ἐνώπιον τοῦ θεοῦ. 30 ἐξ αὐτοῦ δὲ ὑμεῖς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ, ὃς ἐγενήθη σοφία ἡμῖν ἀπὸ θεοῦ, δικαιοσύνη τε καὶ ἁγιασμός καὶ ἀπολύτρωσις, 31 ἵνα καθὼς γέγραπται· Ὁ καυχώμενος ἐν κυρίῳ καυχάσθω. [SBLGNT]

### King James Version

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble,

### New Rendition

26 Consider your own calling, brothers and sisters. Not many of you are clever by human standards, not many are

272. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 161.

273. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 153–54.

are called: 27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: 29 That no flesh should glory in his presence. 30 But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: 31 That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

people of importance, not many are of high status. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to put the wise to shame, and God chose the weak things of the world so that he might put the powerful things to shame. 28 God chose the insignificant things of the world, and the things that are despised, things that are regarded as nothing, to nullify the things that are regarded as being something, 29 so that no one can boast in God's presence. 30 It is because of him that you have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption, 31 so that, as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord."

### Translation Notes and Comments

**1:26 For ye see your calling / Consider your own calling:** The verb βλέπω (*blepō*), "see," means "to perceive with the eye," but it carries the nuance of mental activity expressed by the word "consider." The word κλήσις (*klēsis*), "calling," denotes the position one holds or the condition in which one finds himself. In this case, Paul is referring to their conversion.<sup>274</sup> Thus, Paul is saying, "Consider your own conversion." The point the Apostle is making is that the membership of the Church, for the most part, consisted in men and women that the world considered to be insignificant and of little worth. What he wants them to realize is that if the gospel were a new and grand philosophy, God would not have addressed it to weaklings, base-born, even those considered fools. Yet, God reached out to these with the gift of his gospel and the blessing of deep spiritual endowment because the gospel is not philosophy.<sup>275</sup> God's call suggested that, in spite of what the wise believed, these converts were actually of great value. In essence, they were the proof that God does not use human wisdom or strength to successfully accomplish his tasks.<sup>276</sup>

274. BDAG, 549.

275. Findlay, "St. Paul's First Epistle," 771.

276. Fitzmyer, *First Corinthians*, 161.

*not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble are called / Not many of you are clever by human standards, not many are people of importance, not many are of high status:* Paul uses the Greek word σοφοί (*sophoi*), “wise persons,” with a pejorative spin that the idea of “clever people” catches. They are very mentally quick and adroit at contrivances and schemes and, thus, clever at what they do.<sup>277</sup>

The phrase κατὰ σάρκα (*kata sarka*), literally, “according to the flesh,” carries the idea of being measured according to human standards and is translated that way in our Rendition. Because Paul connects the idea with οἱ σοφοί (*hoi sophoi*), “the wise or clever,” he is pointing out, “Not many of you are clever as the world counts cleverness.”<sup>278</sup>

The noun δυνατοί (*dynatoi*), “important people,” denotes people of high standing because of their ability to influence others,<sup>279</sup> while the noun εὐγενεῖς (*eugeneis*), “noble” (literally “well born”), also refers to “important people,” but it looks to their rank or birth. Since, however, it also includes those outside of the nobility, our Rendition uses “high status.”<sup>280</sup>

The JST changes the word “called” to “chosen.” In doing so, it shows that the call is not exclusive. People are called from all stations but, among the stubbornly self-sufficient, few accept that call and, therefore, deny themselves the blessing of becoming the chosen of God.

**1:27** *But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise / But God chose the foolish things of the world to put the wise to shame:* Paul uses the noun τὰ μῶρα (*ta mōra*), “foolish things,” ironically since he is referring to the Saints. From the world’s perspective, what they believe is foolish. However, God will prove the world’s view wrong. Paul uses the verb καταισχύνω (*kataischynō*), “to cause someone to be much ashamed—to humiliate, to disgrace,”<sup>281</sup> to show the depth of humiliation the world will feel when it realizes God successfully used the humble Saints as his tools to bring about his marvelous work. The world powers would not only be robbed of their glory and power but, more importantly, of their actual being.<sup>282</sup>

*God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty / and God chose the weak things of the world so that*

277. BDAG, 935; *Dictionary of Synonyms*, 152, s.v. “clever.”

278. See Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 183.

279. Louw-Nida, §87.43.

280. BDAG, 404; Louw-Nida, §87.27.

281. Louw-Nida, §25.194.

282. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle,” 772.

**he might put the powerful things to shame:** Paul uses the term τὰ ἀσθενῆ (*ta asthenē*), “the weak things,” ironically, since he is again referring to the Saints. The Apostle again uses the word κατασχύνω (*kataischynō*) to show the depth of humiliation God will bring upon τὰ ἰσχυρά (*ta ischyra*), “the strong things,” a term denoting those of power and might.<sup>283</sup>

**1:28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised / God chose the insignificant things of the world, and the things that are despised:** Continuing his parallel structure, Paul continues with irony, now referring to the Saints as τὰ ἀγενῆ (*ta agene*), literally, “things not of noble birth,” but meaning here that which is base, obscure, or insignificant.<sup>284</sup> The latter definition, carrying the nuance of “inconsequential,” works well as it stands in contrast to the wise, the mighty, and those of station. But Paul really pushes his point by referring to the Saints as τὰ ἐξουθενημένα (*ta exouthenēmena*), “the despised things.” The word describes that which is seen as having no merit or value. It carries, however, the strong negative connotation of something despised and, therefore, rejected.<sup>285</sup>

**things which are not, to bring to naught things that are / things that are regarded as nothing, to nullify the things that are regarded as being something:** The phrase τὰ μὴ ὄντα, ἵνα τὰ ὄντα καταργήσῃ (*ta mē onta, hina ta onta katargēsē*) translates literally as “the things that do not exist, so that the things that exist might be nullified.” Paul has been describing the Saints with very pejorative words, going from bad to worse. Here he hits bottom. He calls them τὰ μὴ ὄντα (*ta mē onta*), “the nonexisting things.” Again, using irony, Paul shows the world as viewing the Saints of such little significance and influence so as to be nonexistent. But the real irony is that, through them, God will bring to nothing the powerful, the significant, and the influential. In short, the Christians will remain while the Greco-Roman world will not.

Paul is emphasizing the vast difference between how God views things and the world views them. Those things that the world values most are of little or no worth from a divine, eternal perspective, and the things the world considers worthless are of immense, eternal worth.

The JST reads “to bring to naught the things that are mighty.” The change focuses particular attention on those in high position in the various

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283. BDAG, 483.

284. BDAG, 9; Louw-Nida, §87.59. Ogden and Skinner, *Verse by Verse*, 130, notes that “in the early 1600s, *base* meant lowly or humble.”

285. BDAG, 352.

fields—the very ones whose power, authority, or ideas are least likely to sink into oblivion. But the power of the gospel makes a shame out of them.

**1:29 *That no flesh should glory in his presence / so that no one can boast in God's presence:*** Paul now expresses the reason God does what he does. The verb *καυχάομαι* (*kauchaomai*), “to boast,” carries the idea of bragging to bring upon one’s self glory or honor.<sup>286</sup> The phrase *πᾶσα σὰρξ* (*pasa sarx*), literally, “any flesh,” refers to mortals. Paul’s point is that because God did things the way he did, none will be able to take credit. The foolish, weak, despised, and inconsequential see themselves as tools of the Lord and, therefore, will not take credit, while the wise, strong, and influential will see their folly and be unable to brag.

**1:30 *But of him are ye in Christ Jesus / It is because of him that you have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus:*** In the writings of both Paul and John, the preposition *ἐν* (*en*) is used to designate a close personal relationship, so that sense of the phrase *ὕμεῖς ἐστε ἐν Χριστῷ Ἰησοῦ* (*hymeis este en Christō Iēsou*), literally “you are in Christ Jesus” is best rendered in English “you have a personal relationship with Christ Jesus,”<sup>287</sup> as in our Rendition. Paul’s point is clear: their new life was derived from God and remained ever grounded in the Savior.<sup>288</sup> The Christians cannot even take credit for their coming into relationship with the Lord, for even this is God’s handiwork. He was the one who gave the Lord to all as Savior; he was the one who sent missionaries; he is the one who, through the power of the Holy Ghost, witnessed that Jesus was the Messiah; he was the one who restored the Melchizedek priesthood; he is the one who prepared the way for entrance in the kingdom; he is the one who made spiritual rebirth possible; he is the one who gave the powers of the Spirit to each soul as a *gift*. Therefore, none can boast.

***who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption / who has become for us wisdom from God, as well as righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:*** Paul now shows where the real strength of the Saints lies; it is with Christ. He is God’s wisdom, meaning that he is the one who both reveals and executes the Father’s will.<sup>289</sup> By accepting that idea, the Saints themselves become wise. He is

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286. BDAG, 536.

287. BDAG, 327.

288. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle,” 773.

289. Though Paul describes Jesus as “the wisdom of God,” he is not identifying the Lord with the figure of wisdom that the Gnostics will later develop. Neither Paul nor the Corinthians at this time see “wisdom as a pre-existent divine hypostasis or person.” For discussion,



also the source of the Saints' righteousness.<sup>290</sup> Here the word δικαιοσύνη (*dikaioσynē*) denotes a declaration by the Lord that a person is acquitted from all guilt. Further, the Lord imputes righteousness to him.<sup>291</sup> Thus, the person receives not only divine acquittal but also moral virtue. This station opens up the way for sanctification. The noun ἁγιασμός (*hagiasmos*) comes from the same root as "holy" and "Saint." The word is cultic in that it is most closely associated with the temple and denotes something consecrated or dedicated to God. Over time the connotation broadened to include the resultant moral behavior that comes from close association with Deity. Even so, the emphasis is not so much on morality as it is on that kind of religious activity that evidences dedication to God and his will.<sup>292</sup> The result is redemption.<sup>293</sup> The noun ἀπολύτρωσις (*apolytrōsis*), "redemption," is most closely related to the slave market where a slave was traded from one master to another when the latter paid the required price. A slave could be liberated if his owner paid a redemption price at the temple. At that point, the former slave came under the protection of the god.<sup>294</sup> Redemption had three components: (1) liberation from some kind of bondage; (2) liberation by some costly act, and (3) liberation to a new station of service, freed from the old master but indebted to the new. For the Christian, however, there was real freedom in the process.<sup>295</sup> The model works well in 1 Corinthians

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see James D. G. Dunn, *Christology in the Making: An Inquiry into the Origins of the Doctrine of the Incarnation*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1996), 176–87, 194–95. Jesus is, rather, the word of God (see John 1:1–3) and, following the idea of "wisdom" as found in Judaism (see especially Prov. 1:1–6; 8:1–14; 9:1–10; 14:1–8; 24:1–7), he is the one who not only expounds the will of God but also brings about his purposes.

290. The noun δικαιοσυνή (*dikaioσynē*) occurs only here in this epistle though the cognate verb δικαίω (*dikaioō*) is found in 4:4; 6:11. In each instance the word is declarative in judging something as righteous.

291. For discussion, see Translation Notes for Rom. 4:13; 5:15 and James 2:23 in this commentary series.

292. See Louw-Nida, §53.44.

293. Slaves could become free by manumission (Latin *manumissio censu*) and by buying their way out (Latin *peculium*). For a study on Greek and Roman slave practices, see K. R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987). Paul's model does not include these means of becoming free likely because they have no counterpart in the plan of salvation.

294. Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 318–32.

295. The imagery is not dependent solely on Greco-Roman society. Israel itself was in slavery in Egypt, and God brought them out at a price of the firstborn of the Egyptians. Further, the firstborn of the Hebrews were redeemed from God's service through the temple donation made in their behalf.

in that these people lived in the lowly condition of being “nothings,” but through the costly death of the Savior, they gained status and freedom from sin and death. All this came solely through Christ’s Atonement and, thus, they could glory only “in the Lord.”

**1:31 *He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord* / “Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord”:** The quote is from Jeremiah 9:24.<sup>296</sup> Paul began this pericope by quoting scripture; he ends the same way, thus giving his argument divine force. His point is that all boasting should be in the Lord who opened the way of salvation. This verse, strengthened by its scriptural source, puts into sharp focus Paul’s point—not only for the first chapter but also for the whole epistle.<sup>297</sup>

### Analysis and Summary

At this point, Paul begins his second of three arguments showing the superiority of God’s wisdom over that of humankind by using the nature, composition, and social status of the Christian community either as it stands or as it is perceived. Some have taken Paul’s words to suggest that the early Christian movement was among the poorest class of the Greco-Roman world.<sup>298</sup> The latest studies, however, have modified this view somewhat, showing that quite a number of influential people were drawn through the Church’s doors.<sup>299</sup> Thus, Paul was addressing a community experiencing “status inconsistency,”<sup>300</sup> with high and low born, rich and poor, free and bond, all meeting together. Thus, the branches evidenced a cross section of Corinthian society.

Unfortunately, this diversity did not protect the Church from problems but exacerbated them. Many Christians from all classes and levels of society were infected with the Corinthian disease of pride and, thus, competed with one another for status and position. Paul likely chose his words in 1:26 as a reminder to many of them of their humble origins.<sup>301</sup> The Apostle’s argument accomplishes two tasks: “it lowers the conceit of the readers,”

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296. The quote is not exact, for Paul replaces τούτω (*toutō*), “this,” with κύριω (*kyriō*), “Lord,” but the meaning is the same.

297. Barth, *Resurrection of the Dead*, 17–18.

298. See, for example, Deissmann, *Light from the Ancient East*, 144.

299. See, for example, E. A. Judge, *The Social Pattern of the Christian Groups in the First Century* (London: Tyndale Press, 1960), 60.

300. Wayne A. Meeks, *The First Urban Christians: The Social World of the Apostle Paul* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1983), 54, 68–73.

301. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 23–24.

as one authority notes, “while it discloses the true mission of the Gospel.”<sup>302</sup> Paul’s point is that the gospel plan is not a mere self-improvement program. It is rather a radical rescue brought about through the transforming power found in the grace of Christ. Thus, as one scholar noted, “Grace is not only the great unifier but also the great leveler.”<sup>303</sup> The Corinthian branches needed to understand that point—all were equally dependent on Christ and his Atonement, therefore, none could take credit for any degree of spiritual superiority or righteousness.

Paul’s concern is giving credit where it is due. Many of the Corinthians, being heavily involved in self-reliance and self-promotion, bragged about all they did. Self-glory was a large part of the game they played. In this portion of his argument, Paul redirects this καύχασθαι (*kauchasthai*), “glorying, boasting,” to God and Christ. He shows that God has used the Christians to put down the wise, the influential, and the powerful and, in the process, made them wise, influential, and powerful in the eternal scheme.<sup>304</sup> In 1:29, Paul makes his point, showing that “glorying is inappropriate in God’s presence because whatever provides grounds for such glorying [station, gifts of the spirit, rebirth, etc.] has come from God as his gift.”<sup>305</sup> Thus, the Apostle begins 1:30 with ἐξ αὐτοῦ (*ex autou*), “It is from him that,” the phrase forcing Paul’s readers to remember that God alone made their relationship with Jesus possible. Therefore, they have no right to brag about anything. But the idea goes a step further; in Christ they have not only access to salvation but also to the perfect model of leadership.<sup>306</sup> That model does away with any self-glorying and puts a stop to all boasting.

Paul is trying to get his readers to see that the message of the cross brings a complete reversal to how the Greco-Roman world assesses success. It is not wealth, education, birth, or position that gives one status before God, but obedience, humility, and—above all—self-sacrifice displayed in loving service. Paul builds his thesis using two triads: the foolish things, the weak things, and the insignificant stand in contrast to the wise, the strong, and the influential.<sup>307</sup> Using both irony and hyperbole, Paul refers to the Saints

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302. Findlay, “St. Paul’s First Epistle,” 771.

303. Witherington, *Conflict and Community*, 118.

304. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 180–81.

305. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 188.

306. Dale B. Martin, *The Corinthian Body* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1995), 59.

307. τὰ ἀγενῆ (*ta agenē*), “the insignificant,” (see BDAG, 8) is contrasted with the τὰ ὄντα (*ta onta*), “those with station,” not the εὐγενεῖς (*eugeneis*), “noble born.”

as τὰ μὴ ὄντα (*ta mē onta*), literally “things that are not,” because, by their society’s standards, the Christians are “nothings.” The reality is, however, that in God’s eyes they are not only “somethings” but also the force by which he will bring to nothing the works, policies, and philosophies of their society’s assessed wise, strong, and influential.<sup>308</sup>

Paul’s argument finds force in Isaiah 55:8–9 wherein the Lord states, “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts.” Thus, Jehovah made clear that his ways are not human ways. One fact that emphasizes this point is the nature of those whom he calls into his kingdom. He feels free to call those whom the world sees as weak, untrained, even naïve, but the Lord is proving a point: that he can give understanding and insight to any, both learned and unlearned, who are willing to humble themselves and follow his ways. The Lord has made it clear that “I call upon the weak things of the world, those who are unlearned and despised, to thresh the nations by the power of my Spirit” (D&C 35:13). He assured Joseph Smith that “for unto this end have I raised you up, that I might show forth my wisdom through the weak things of the earth” (D&C 124:1; compare D&C 1:19; 35:13; 133:59).

There is a reason for this. It is the humble who can master spiritual things. This ability is “in large measure a matter of pre-existent preparation,” notes Elder McConkie. “Some people developed in the pre-mortal life the talents to recognize truth, to comprehend spiritual things, to receive revelation from the Spirit; others did not. Those so endowed spiritually were fore-ordained and sent to the earth to serve at God’s command as his ministers.”<sup>309</sup>

In all his response to human wisdom, God had his purpose. It was to stop all boasting. For Paul, boasting exhibits the fundamental mindset he is trying to change. It shows that people are putting trust in their own cleverness, strength, ability, and even righteousness to save themselves. God found fault with ancient Israel for this very attitude, noting that he treated that people the way he did “lest Israel vaunt themselves against me, saying, Mine own hand hath saved me” (Judg. 7:2). It was this same mindset that separated many Jews from Jesus (see Rom. 1:16–32). Paul is trying to get the Corinthians to understand that human beings cannot bring about their own salvation no matter how wise, clever, or strong they are. Paul

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308. Thiselton, *First Epistle*, 185.

309. *DNTC*, 2:317.

ends his second argument by making this very point. Indeed, he insists that all are dependent on God and Christ for quality of life in this world and in the world to come. Therefore, there is no room to brag of one's deeds or the positions one has held, for none of these count. What counts is Christ whose teachings hold real wisdom for they are from God, whose righteousness is the model, whose grace brings sanctification, and finally, whose Atonement brings redemption. All these he bestows on the Saints so that they become wise, righteous, sanctified, and redeemed. Therefore, all glorying should be in praise of Christ and all he has done. The idea is confirmed in a commandment found in D&C 76:61, "let no man glory in man, but rather let him glory in God."

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