



# Finding Contentment through Boasting

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IT IS A SAD CONDITION of our fallen hearts that when we see God's goodness to others, so often instead of rejoicing with them and praising God, we become envious, antagonistic to their happiness, and discontent with our own situation. Instead of celebrating and blessing God for the good things He has given them—a happy marriage, children, natural abilities and talents, financial or ministry success—we feel threatened, excluded, or neglected.

This sinful response is common to all people, but it is a struggle for Christians because we know our hearts should not respond this way. We know that God has already been unspeakably gracious to us by giving us every spiritual blessing in Christ (Eph. 1:3), and that we should be perfectly content with whatever comes to us because we already have all things (1 Cor. 3:21).

But knowing God's Word and obeying it from the heart are different things, and often in our sanctification we feel the gap between them. Nevertheless, the Holy Spirit does not leave us to make up this difference on our own but equips and empowers us to do as He has commanded.

One passage that can be particularly helpful in the fight for contentment is found in Paul's instruction to the church

at Corinth. In 1 Corinthians, Paul addresses a problem the church is having with personality cults, where some are saying, "I follow Paul," and others, "I follow Apollos," and there is quarreling and division among them. In his analysis of this behavior, Paul discerns that their rallying around well-known preachers stems from a worldly desire to exalt themselves through association. In other words, by favoring a particular church leader, the people are trying to puff themselves up (4:6). Rather than being content with who they are or what they have, they are attempting to place themselves above others in the church.

Some among them favor Paul, most likely because he was an Apostle and the first to bring the gospel and establish the church in Corinth. Many would have learned the basics of the faith under Paul while he taught the Word of God to them for eighteen months (Acts 18:11). A few could even boast of having been baptized by him (1 Cor. 1:14–16).

Others in the church favor Apollos. Unlike Paul, who spoke "not with words of eloquent wisdom" but "in weakness and in fear and much trembling" (1:17; 2:3), Apollos was "an eloquent man" and, while in Corinth, he "powerfully refuted the Jews in public" (Acts 18:24–28). Perhaps those who boasted

in him were among his disciples and had come to share in his gifts and reputation.

In addition to these, there are other groups in the church who, for one reason or another, place their boast in Cephas or Christ over against the rest (1 Cor. 1:12). Each group has its chosen champion, and certainly they are leaders worthy to be followed, but Paul discerns in all of these factions not the noble outcome of spiritual loyalty or conviction, but plain and simple worldliness. "Merely human" behavior, he calls it (3:4), and as part of his correction, he reminds the church why, instead of being divided, they ought rather to be united. He writes,

*For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1:26–29)*

Against the Corinthians' tribalism, Paul reestablishes the ground for their unity by reminding them of what they have in common: they are all essentially a band of nobodies whom, precisely on account of their lack of distinction, God has been pleased to call His own. No matter how much they may try to surpass one another, they are all so insignificant that any such competition between them is inconsequential. What is more, being the wisest, most powerful, or most distinguished is not what God cares

about. In fact, as seen in 1:29–31, being great "according to worldly standards" (v. 26) and placing confidence in that (boasting in self) is the antithesis to the reason that God chose them. He elected them and united them with Christ Jesus so that Christ might be their "wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption."

The Corinthians' attempts to exalt themselves fly in the face of God's purposes for them in Christ, which are that "no human

being might boast in the presence of God" but instead that they would acknowledge and own all that Christ has done for them and "boast in the Lord."

This passage reminds us of what does and does not make for true contentment. Seeking to exalt ourselves through our own accomplishments or associations

is a deception that divides Christ's church and robs Him of the glory that belongs to Him alone. This is the problem with envying others' blessings and becoming discontented: it reveals that we are seeking significance in earthly accolades, possessions, or power, all of which ultimately fail.

True contentment comes when our boast is in the Lord. It comes when we remember our complete unworthiness to be given any good thing, receive God's "inexpressible gift" to us in Christ Jesus (2 Cor. 9:15), and recognize with heartfelt gratitude and overflowing praise that every gift, whether to us or to others, is wisely and lovingly given by God in accordance with His good purposes for all His people. ■

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