

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty-Three)

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I am going to continue the sermon that I have been giving the past three or four times. I am still on the same chapter of Ecclesiastes, but at the same time we are going to go into Psalm 73, because I want to preface this sermon with one half of that psalm. There is very important instruction there for what Solomon is working through there in Ecclesiastes 7.

Psalm 73:1-10 Truly God is good to Israel, to such as are pure in heart, but as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; my steps had nearly slipped, for I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. For there are no pangs in their death, but their strength is firm. They are not in trouble as other men, nor are they plagued like other men. Therefore pride serves as their necklace; violence covers them like a garment. Their eyes bulge with abundance; they have more than heart could wish. They scoff and speak wickedly concerning oppression; they speak loftily. They set their mouth against the heavens, and their tongue walks through the earth. Therefore his people return here, and waters of a full cup are drained by them.

I think that it is clear from a reasonably close reading of this psalm that one of the major influences the psalmist had to battle, besides believing that he was directly punished, was that those in the world seem to be living comfortable lives, having all of the enjoyment that he was being denied. As the feelings of resentment and discontent rose, they grew into outright envy regarding the seemingly superior life the unconverted was living compared to his.

It was not very long before envy was joined by jealousy, because he was fearful of being ignored by God, while another—the unconverted—was receiving favors. His thinking and feelings were no doubt an exaggeration, but we have to come to understand that it seemed true to him in his suffering.

His mindset was a means of making himself feel somewhat better about his circumstance by shifting part of the blame elsewhere. In this case it was God.

This process is part of a natural self-justifying, “it’s not my fault I’m being picked on,” defense mechanism. That is, in all probability, our carnality letting itself be known. As we continue to explore the paradox of Ecclesiastes 7, there are a number of realities that we have to keep in mind. An important one is this: it is a delusion that people in the world are living comfortable lives while we are the only ones who are in trouble.

You should understand that nothing physical—if you go back over Psalm 73, you will see that he emphasized the blessings that these people seem to be receiving—has the power to give contentment except for short periods of time.

The second one is: if we are looking for comfort in life we are in wrong outfit. This is another reality that we have to adjust our thinking to. Christian living is far and away better than what the world has, it is filled with hope that the world does not have, but it is not easy. Real comfort in life is in a spiritual state and is a product of faith in God.

If a Christian’s mind is based on comfort, that person will not grow nor glorify God. That is a real-life fact, because Christianity requires dedication and discipline to the work that God lays before us. This is one of Ecclesiastes main themes. It begins right at the beginning of the book, and that theme is that the world is living in vanity. If we believe that, how can we ever reach the conclusion that they are getting all of the good things? That vanity means uselessness. They might be doing a lot of drifting, but they are not producing anything that is going to really give a quality of life to them, because those things have a spiritual base to them that comes from God.

The third factor is: Ecclesiastes is written primarily for the spiritual well-being of God's children, those who are dedicating their lives to above-the-sun categories.

The fourth factor is: when God called us He chose us and put us into a circumstance in which our lives have been changed radically. We know that He has put a hedge or wall about us. We always think of that as being a

means of defense, and indeed it is, but that hedge, wall, has also somewhat isolated us from the world. A wall does both, it defends, it also isolates us, and God has then put us inside that wall where the main thrust concerns the Kingdom of God, and pleasing God.

God purposely put us within that in order to separate us from what is going on in the world. The psalmist was concerned about what the world was doing. As you can see, his mind was not in the right place at this time. It was focused on himself and not the responsibility that God gave him to do, and that is where much of his problem lies.

When God puts us inside the wall, then events begin to happen a great deal more purposefully and also with greater precision, and that is because God knows where He is going with our life and we only vaguely know. Where He is going is going to require us to put forth some effort to meet the challenges that He is putting into our lives. In other words, we are going to have trials that are directly connected to the purpose that *He* has in mind, not necessarily the purpose that we understand and fully agree with at the time. These trials are *designed* to happen.

The psalmist was in a trial that was designed for him. Of course we understand when we read the whole psalm that he got a hold of himself, he worked it out with God, and things worked out alright.

Ecclesiastes 7:15-18 I have seen all things in my days of vanity: there is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise; why should you destroy yourself? Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish; why should you die before your time? It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all.

Psalm 73 confirms that one of the spiritual difficulties we may fall into is believing that a trial that we are enduring was brought upon us because we were being punished. The psalmist directly says that in verse 12-14, that he was punished every morning, and he seemed to be having difficulty all day long.

Sometimes this line of reasoning in the converted almost seems as natural as breathing. This thought builds in us because of a combination of our admiration for God, and thus our desire to honor Him, but that is contrasted with the present knowledge of our own character weaknesses, and the two of them taken together find a wide difference between what we are and what we believe that God expects of us, because of the purity of His character. Almost all of the time we conclude that we deserve to be punished, because we know how frequently we fall short of living perfectly.

Our conclusion may contain a measure of correctness, except for one major truth. At conversion our relationship with God underwent a radical mind-bending change, in one blink of time we became the recipient of God's grace, gifted with His Spirit, made part of the family of God, and are more actively being created in the image of Jesus Christ. That is four major elements that are all part of a life-changing situation.

How we allow this combination to impact on the conduct of our life, and the attitudes in which we conduct our life, we are involved in in this paradox issue, because it will create problems, confusion to some degree. The desire to please God is helpful, so also is a general awareness of our sinfulness, because we have to know we are different from God. We are not exactly like Him, so God intends that we look up to Him and His holiness, and that we look at ourselves too, in a genuinely, realistic manner. Our conclusion there is that we are sinners.

From this we should be able to rightly reason that we have earned any pains we experience as a result of our sinfulness. The reality of the difficulties of life must be understood as a part of a creative process that we were not as knowledgeable of before our calling, because God is now more actively and intensively involved in our life. What I am getting at here is, we have to come to the conclusion that the difficulties of life, after we are called, have a purpose to them, they are not just happening randomly. We are not being picked on, we are being educated into something that we did not have to deal with before.

This has a purpose, these things are not happening randomly. Please turn to John 17. It contains Jesus' prayer for those who were gathered before Him,

on that night before His crucifixion. He prayed not just for them but also for us. John 17:3 is important to life after we are called.

John 17:3 “And this is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.”

Let us understand this. This is why we have the difficulties. Do not lose sight of this because it is very important! Do we really *know* God when we are called? We know things *about* Him, we know that He is the Creator, that is just an ‘about’ thing. We know that He created the heavens and earth, we know that He gives us life and breath, we know that He has a purpose. Those things are there but they are also highly generalized. That is not the kind of *knowing* that Jesus is talking about here.

Once God brings us into His family, life becomes far more specifically purposeful than it ever was before, because God has made the goal in life for us clearer. I just mentioned earlier, life's direction has made a radical turn. We may have just been drifting through life, but once God calls He takes charge of things and begins to turn that life into another direction.

We have just read, one of the things we have to learn from life now is, we have to *know* Him. That is, knowing about Him, this is knowing Him. You know a lot of human beings from a distance, they are in the neighborhood, they work where you do, but you do not know them like you know your husband or wife. It is the closeness of the relationship that makes the difference. What God has done is that He has drawn us into the family so that we can come to know Him.

We might say: His attitudes, His responses, the way He reacts, the direction He is going—there might be thousands of different things that we do not know about God as part of His character or His way. We only know things, as we begin, generally.

The word eternal in verse 3 is not talking about length of life. We usually think of that in terms of length of life, but rather in this context it is indicating quality of life. Eternal life is the quality of life that the God family lives. This is what we want to come to understand, not only God, but also learning and practicing the quality of life that God lives.

How do we do this? By coming to know Him, and following Him, doing what He does, taking every step like He does, and on and on. I think you get the point. This can only be done within a relationship, it cannot be viewed from the outside and really come to know the other person like you would know from within a relationship. We are not talking about intellectual book type knowing, but rather an intimate knowledge that rises from within a relationship, and a knowing that comes from experiencing things together.

We have been introduced into the family for that very purpose. This is the only way that we can get the experience of really knowing God in the way that He wants us to know Him. So within that relationship we become part of a creative purpose that is reshaping us in preparation for an awesome future and at the same time being made direct use of right now, as a witness of God before the world, and as a vital member of His church.

We must now look upon the events of life within this intimate contact. This is why we have problems, and when we are in the problem, that relationship is to help guide us to do what needs to be done.

God is directly involved with us in order that we come to know Him intimately, not just in terms of what we might read in a book. Thus instead of believing that we are being picked upon, as I said earlier in this sermon (I do not like that because it has negative connotations to it), rather because of our calling *we have been singled out for positive training*. We are not being picked on, but we have been singled out for positive training in a narrow parameter of life.

The difficulties we go through are not to be viewed as being dominated by punishment. We will get to why more clearly a little later. Instead the difficulty in the trials have a purpose, a purpose that they never had before. Thus while going through a trial it will in one sense be not much different in principle than taking a test in school.

When we go to school, or have gone in the past, the test that we took probably on specific subjects, such as a test in mathematics. You might think, "I'm never going to use anything here." Yes you will, because mathematics very definitely impacts on other subjects that you also had in

school to some degree. Mathematics will impact on other such studies such as history, geography, chemistry, music, and many others.

In like manner, a testing of our faith impacts on many other aspects of life: where we have a weakness in which we need support from a strength in faith, so that those problems can be worked out and overcome as well. When our faith is being tested, it is being tested because it has impact on other aspects of life, right along with it as well.

What is specifically more important in this context that we are talking about here, especially in regard to the paradox of verse 15, is that we do not allow testing to unbalance our mind by thinking that this weighty issue, that is the test, is totally punishment, rather than a positive learning experience, preparing us for more growth.

A summary statement in Ecclesiastes 7, we are receiving a head's up through Solomon to not allow our resolution to do better, which is most certainly not wrong of and by itself, to get out of control and produce damage rather than building. If that were not so, there would be no warning right in the context immediately following verse 15.

What he says in verse 15 is followed by a couple of warnings. If there was no danger in verse 15 in what we consider the paradox, he would never give a warning, but the warnings are there. This is a potentially dangerous situation that the paradox is describing.

Please turn to II Timothy 1. I want to confirm something to us. Earlier I mentioned our resolution to do better, and that is good, but our resolution to do better can get out of control. That is why the warning is there. If you listen carefully to what David Grabbe said at the beginning of his sermonette, you might be able to make a connection here about the person who was self-righteous, in what David was describing.

II Timothy 1:6-8 Therefore I remind you to stir up the gift of God which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God has not given us a spirit of fear, but of power and of love and of a sound

mind. Therefore do not be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord, nor of me His prisoner, but share with me in the sufferings for the gospel according to the power of God.

I have turned to these verses because they confirm that we have been given the power by God, through the means of His Holy Spirit, to control and help set our attitude and pace of using our life in Christ to yield to God, and glorify Him, and overcome. This is important to the paradox. Remember I said, our thinking can get out of whack in the midst of that kind of a difficulty, because our resolution gets bent in the wrong direction.

The word sound, when used as an adjective as it is here, means solid. Think of this in relation to our thinking—stable, firm, safe, and trustworthy. That word in the Greek indicates a procedure or activity, overcoming, growing, thinking. It indicates something, a procedure of activity based in good judgment. That is what sound things are, we do sound things that have at their base good judgment.

You put that into the context here, and what Paul is saying is that God has given us His Spirit in order to control our thinking, to make sure it goes in the right direction. The paradox has a means, because of its difficulty, of twisting where we do not make a good judgment. Yet even when we make the judgment, we think it is good, we think it is right, but it is not, and it traps us and leads us into something that David Grabbe was leading to in his sermonette.

It is interesting that this is the only place that this particular term, translated sound, is used in the New Testament, and it literally means, saving the mind through admonishing and calling to soundness and self control. In other words, it is the actual disciplining or exercising of one's mind so life will not be deteriorated.

In other words, the person is disciplining himself, because he is beginning to see his life drifting in the wrong direction, and so he makes an adjustment to his mind that will protect him. God's Spirit working within us enables us with the power to do that, to make a correction in our thinking so that life will not be deteriorated. Paul is explaining that we have been given the power to *focus* our mind on what *should be done*.

Notice that it follows the word fear that appears a little bit earlier in the sentence. Sound is modifying or clarifying, that by means of exercising the power of the Holy Spirit—in this case fear is the enemy, and that enemy can be overcome.

The word fear indicates a respect for what is confronting one. Fear of God is a positive respect, because it leads to pleasing Him. That is good, but the fear in a circumstance is one of outright fright that one would tend to run from, or more plainly, that fear would work to destroy one's faith, or hinder growth.

We see something we fear, and our mind immediately tells us to run! It is right here that we need to use God's Spirit, and we say to ourselves, "Why should I run from this? Why don't I just face it and beat it?" That is what we are talking about here.

This soundness here is something that can take place within our own mind, where we make the adjustment, rather than running from the fear, we face it and overcome it. That adjustment begins in the mind. We do that because we do not want our character to be deteriorated. That is what Paul is talking about here.

If you think you are getting punished all of the time whenever you have a difficulty in a trial, what are you most likely going to do? You are going to run from it. Do we ever stop to think that God is the one who arranged this trial so that you have to face it? And that you and Him together can conquer it? What do you get out of that? You get to know Him, that He is there. What that does for our faith is immense. Now we know He can back you up and He will, so why run from these things?

We will get back to the paradox. In this case it is not something, in a way, that we are running from, but rather something that we are given to doing that can produce bad fruit and we will see more of this as we go along. On the surface it looks good, but over the long run, this thing that the paradox is about is not good, it is bad—it is very bad because it is so deceptive. It looks so good, but it is something from Satan, and he takes advantage of us.

In II Timothy 2:6-8, we are instructed that the Holy Spirit enables us to give balanced service to God for His glorification and at the same time our preservation. I want to say now, the service that we give God in a situation like this is balanced, it is not weird. We will get to that a little bit later.

What is the danger in this paradox? It is the temptation toward becoming super-righteous in order produce the promises of God on the basis of our own works. That is what Solomon is addressing here, and that is why he gives the caution in verses 16-17. He does not embellish on them, you have to look in other portions of the Bible to begin to see what he is talking about.

This paradox is: the temptation toward becoming super-righteous. The verse has to do with somebody facing a trial, he thinks he is being punished. He is ordinary Joe Christian, he evaluates God as holy, and says I am weak, I fail all the time, therefore He is great and I am small, so what kind of a resolution then is a Christian possibly going to fall into? He is going to resolve, “I’m going to do better, I’m going to really set my will and I’m going to be righteous with every act of my life.” That is the way it starts! It seemingly starts with a good idea, a good resolution to do better, but if we do not watch ourselves it can lead to trouble—bad trouble.

In the commentary, *The Preacher’s Homiletic Commentary* (I do not know when it was published, looks like from the 1600s), I did some research into Ecclesiastes 7:15-22. One of the first things that captivated me there was that they arranged everything in paragraph form, and they titled the paragraph with this title: “The cautions of a religious philosopher”. I think the people who were commenting on this had the right idea. They saw that Solomon was cautioning on something.

Regarding verse 16, the commentator says, “This is not a caution against aiming at the highest excellence in goodness or wisdom, for these are proper objects of a righteous ambition. . . .” I told you this paradox starts out with good intentions, that is what they are saying. “. . . it is rather a caution against the conduct of those who presume to find fault with the methods of God’s dealing with men, as if they could devise and conduct a more satisfactory scheme. This is the most daring form of human arrogance.”

You will appreciate this more as we go through, but that is a very revealing quote. On the same section another commentator named Seow, states this, “Becoming overly righteous is the hubris that one must avoid. That attitude is the very opposite of the fear of God, yet it looks so good in the beginning.” I think these guys have had some experience with this.

A third commentator, his name is Fox, put it this way, “Straining for perfection is presumptuous, a refusal to accept human limitations.” Remember I said about doing the work to attain all of this goodness, it has a catch in it.

Another commentator, his name is Brown, says, “A life obsessed with righteousness in fact blinds a person to his own sinfulness.” That is important.

What is a person who has really set his will—he is making sure that he feels that he is not sinning at any time, in anything that he does, he is so careful about everything—eventually going to be led to be? He is going to be one of the people of the lie, he is going to think so much of himself he cannot do anything wrong. It is really a tricky deception.

The sum of this to this point is, we must not allow ourselves to be led to assume that we are being punished just because we are going through a difficult situation, and then react to this extreme, because Solomon is making clear it has a strong tendency to lead us in a destructive direction.

I am specifically going to read Romans 7:14-25 because of what the subject is and because of the person who has written this. As we go through this I want you to think who in the world is writing this? The apostle Paul is. That guy was pretty high up on the totem pole. Do you think the apostle Paul was a righteous man? I think he was. Do you think that he was entrusted by God with responsibilities that were great for the gifting that he had been given? Do you think that he was somebody that worked hard in great humility for God for what He was doing? Was the apostle Paul acceptable before God? Did the apostle Paul live a sinless life?

Romans 7:14-17 For we know that the law is spiritual, but I am carnal [the deeply converted apostle Paul, this is the way he looked

at himself.], sold under sin. [How long had he been converted, an apostle, to this time?] For what I am doing, I do not understand. For what I will to do that I do not practice; but what I hate, that I do. If, then, I do what I will not to do, I agree with the law that it is good. But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Paul certainly did not think of himself as being sinless. Did Paul think that he was acceptable to God despite this? Yes, he knew he was acceptable to God despite what he is confessing of here. Was Paul striving in the way that is described of that person who is involved in the paradox?

Romans 7:17-20 But now, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me. For I know that in me (that is in my flesh,) nothing good dwells; for to will is present with me, but how to perform what is good I do not find. [He is confessing his faults before all of us.] For the good that I will to do, I do not do, but the evil I will not to do, that I practice. Now if I do what I will not to do, it is no longer I who do it, but sin that dwells in me.

Are we ever going to be sinless? Why waste our time worrying about it? We are reading here of an apostle who had a good mind, he knew that he had sin in him and that he did not always do what he wanted to do and yet he was still acceptable to God, and he did not “dedicate his life to the endless pursuit of perfection.” I realize this is a hard concept to get.

Romans 7:21-25 I find then a law, that evil is present with me, the one who wills to do good. For I delight in the law of God according to the inward man. But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who will deliver me from this body of death? I thank God—through Jesus Christ our Lord! So then, with the mind I myself serve the law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin.

What kind of conclusion can we reach there? This is important. Paul absolutely trusted in God's grace. He did not conduct his life in a desperate search for righteousness. I do not mean that he just gave himself over to sin at all, but he was not concerned that he was going to be saved, because he

trusted God's grace. The person that we are talking about there that gets involved in this thing in Ecclesiastes 7:15, the paradox there, he lives a life of desperation always seeking perfection and he is seeking it on the basis of his own works. His own works cannot cut it—it is absolutely futile.

Salvation is by grace through faith in the blood of Jesus Christ. Any attempt to go beyond that is going to lean to a life of desperation. That is one extreme. The other extreme is to become so caught up with the self that one begins to think that they are perfect because of what they are doing. It will never work.

Paul was very frank. He certainly did not like it that he fell short, but he accepted it as a fact of his converted life and nonetheless he kept moving on without becoming unbalanced in his battle against human nature. In this next verse, I am going to show you that he actually used this to his advantage in regard to life and his work as an apostle of God.

I Corinthians 15:7-11 After that He was seen by James, then by all the apostles. Then last of all He was seen by me also, as by one born out of due time. For I am the least of the apostles, who am not worthy to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. But by the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace toward me was not in vain; but I labored more abundantly than they all, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. Therefore, whether it was I or they, so we preach and so you believed.

He used this as an example to prod himself so that he would never forget exactly where he stood in terms of being gifted by God's grace. He felt exceedingly unworthy, is what the Greek literally says. In fact, the term that he used to indicate his birth is the same term that the Greeks would have used for a premature birth. One commentator went so far as to suggest that Paul had somehow survived an abortion. He did not think highly of himself, but he never turned to super-righteousness as being the answer for what he was. He had more spiritual sense than to do that.

Despite sin still being a part of him, he nonetheless attributed all that he accomplished was by means of God's grace, and he allowed none of this to deter him from his dedication to glorifying God.

Romans 4:1-8 What then shall we say that Abraham our father has found according to the flesh? For if Abraham was justified by works, he has something of which to boast, but not before God. For what does the Scripture say? “Abraham believed God and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Now to him who works, the wages are not counted as grace but as debt. [The mind is shifting in the wrong direction.] But to him who does not work but believes on Him who justifies the ungodly, his faith is accounted for righteousness, just as David also describes the blessedness of the man to whom God imputes righteousness apart from works. “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven and whose sins are covered; blessed is the man to whom the Lord shall not impute sin.”

Do we understand that we cannot add to the quality of the righteousness of Jesus Christ, that God in His mercy accounts to us as though we did it? Think on that. When the righteousness of Christ is given to us because of our faith, the righteousness of Christ is given to us as though we lived a righteous life. Is there anything that we can do that is more holy, good, righteous than the righteousness of Jesus Christ? What in the world is this attempt to somehow do what He did when it has already been done and whatever we do, like the apostle Paul explains in Romans 7, it cannot even begin to add up to what the righteousness of Christ that was freely given to us, and has already done.

Do you see where this eventually leads a person who is becoming super-righteous? He begins to think that he is really in the category of Jesus Christ! The pride becomes so inflated, what can God do with a person like that? Can you understand that that person is not showing faith, he is pushing aside the righteousness of Jesus Christ for his own. This is why those guys said, this is the very height of arrogance. That is the danger in that paradox. It has the possibility of leading us into that kind of a trap and guess who is leading? We will see more of that as we go along here.

The subject in Romans 4 is justification. Justification is a clearing of guilt by the penalty being paid. If the penalty is paid by us for our sins, we die, but God in His mercy allows the life of Jesus Christ and His righteousness to be

given to us on repentance, believing as though we are free and clear before God on the basis of our righteousness. But it is not our own, it is Christ that is given to us to cover all of our sins.

It does not just justify us at the beginning of our conversion.

Romans 5:8-11 But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us. [His righteousness is given to us, because we are still sinners.] Much more then, having now been justified by His blood, we shall be saved from wrath through Him. For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life. And not only that, but we also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received the reconciliation.

What he is saying here is, the righteousness of Jesus Christ not only pays the penalty for our justification whenever we are being converted—we accept the blood of Jesus Christ, we are reconciled to God on the basis of what Jesus Christ did—but what he is saying here is that same sacrifice, that same blood, that same righteousness, is applied to us as we sin through our life under Jesus Christ. In other words we can go back to Him, be forgiven, go back to Him, be forgiven, and on and on, so we are justified all the way through the sanctification period as well—many, many times!

Even the righteousness done through our obedience following baptism and the receiving of God's Holy Spirit, lacks the purity of Christ's righteousness imparted to us and accounted to us, because our righteousness is still tainted by sin that remains dwelling with us. That is what Paul was saying in Romans 7. All through his life he was doing the work of God as an apostle, and he would sin on occasion, and even as he sinned the righteousness of Jesus Christ was applied to him once again, when he repented of those sins right on through.

Paul believed firmly that no righteousness of his would ever be able to pay for his sins—it just cannot be done, it is utterly futile. These people who

resolve that they are never going to sin again, they are not receiving forgiveness because they are not having faith in the blood of Jesus Christ, which is the only thing that will give us forgiveness!

It is not just forgiveness. Please turn to I Corinthians once again. I know that this is not an easy subject.

I Corinthians 1:18-21 For 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. [The world thinks it is foolish, the super-righteous think it is foolish too.] For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.” Where is the wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the disputer of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe.

Now we are talking about His mercy, His kindness, His goodness, His grace, His willingness to accept us even though we still sin, but it is on the basis of what Christ did. Any time we begin to do our obedience in order to get “paid” by God, we are in trouble. Why should He pay us for merely meeting the requirements that He has laid down? That does not exist, we are suppose to do those things anyway.

I Corinthians 1:22-29 For the Jews request a sign, and Greeks seek after wisdom; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called. But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of world to put to shame the things which are mighty; and the base things of world and the things which are

despised God has chosen, and the things which are not to bring to nothing the things that are, that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Why is God doing it this way? As Paul just showed, the people in the world who think they are wise, they think what God is doing is foolish, verse 29, leads to the crux of this whole thing.

I Corinthians 1:29 that no flesh should glory in His presence.

Nobody has anything to brag about before God. Let that sink in. It is almost as though He is going to save us in spite of ourselves, but He is going to do it on His terms. Everything has to be on His terms, the way He has designed it to be done, because this is the only way that He will accept people in His family.

Can you imagine why it has to be done this way? I will give you a hint: because Satan decided he was going to do it his way. We better believe God to a greater extent than Satan did. If we believe Him, we will trust Him, and we will not want to sin, just like Paul did not want to sin. But he readily admitted that he did sin, what he willed to do he did not do, yet it flabbergasted him that despite his weaknesses, God had moved to save him.

We have to come to understanding the way Paul did. He knew he did not deserve it, and so he carried that with him, but at the same time he did not strive in any way to try to outdo God by going beyond what God had provided for his salvation. He stayed within the rules that God had laid down. His faith was in the blood of Jesus Christ, and God's mercy. He did not flaunt that at all, he decided he did not want to sin, and yet he still did so he accepted his own weaknesses knowing that God had a way to cover them.