26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 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. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.”

In the times that Paul wrote this letter, Corinth was the leading city in Greece. It had a population of about maybe 200,000 people. It was a thriving commercial center. So you could imagine it to be a micro-version of perhaps New York City or LA, a very “happening” place. The rich and powerful and influential would have gravitated to the city, along with all of the up and comers looking to get ahead in the world.

Yet within this city, as in any big city, you also would have had a working class, those who were serving at the restaurants and cleaning the houses. It has been estimated that slaves comprised of up to 40% of the citizenship. This is what most of the Christians of Corinth were, a bunch of common everyday people. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.

A pagan philosopher - Celsus - lived who lived between 100 and 200 AD despised the Christians. He said that Christians “show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and little children.” Einstein said that “the word God is for me nothing more than the expression and product of human weaknesses, the Bible a collection of honorable but still primitive legends which are nevertheless pretty childish.” Years ago President Obama was infamously quoted for talking about Americans who bitterly cling to their guns and their religion. It has continued to get more and more boisterous. Academia would say, “Only a stupid Christian would think that someone struggling with alcohol or same sex attraction would need to ‘repent’ of their ‘sin’ that they were born to do.” The Washington Post recently tweeted out, “Trump picks former Georgia governor Sonny Perdue, who once led a prayer for rain, for agriculture secretary.” I would have to assume that this was written as a way of saying, “What an idiot! What a superstitious fool!”

So how do we respond? What I’ve noticed, and what I’m tempted to do as well, is to have more of a defiant attitude against this liberal society that we live in. We say, “Hold on a minute! I’ve prayed for rain before. What’s wrong with that? Does that make me a fool?” Tired of being demeaned we will proudly and defiantly say, “Yeah! That’s right! I’m a bitter clinger.” But then again, I have to ask myself - and so should you - is this what Paul is encouraging in this portion of His word? Is this the best way to let our light shine in a dark world? Is that reflecting the meekness that Jesus spoke of in the Beatitudes?
Pride can raise it’s ugly head in any number of places. I heard a young man once boast, “I bet I’ve brought a lot more people to Christ than you have!” Another challenged me and said, “I bet I’ve read the Bible more than you!” Is this a competition to see who’s better? The most famous Bible passage used to be John 3:16, “God so loved the world.” It was meant to point people to Jesus and His sacrifice for sins. It is interesting to note that the most popular Bible passage today is now Philippians 1:21, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Forget about the fact that Paul was talking about suffering and dying in that passage. No. This verse has been twisted to be all about me and what I can do. I can be rich. I can win a fight. I can get a promotion. I can be healthy. This is nothing but a hidden pride - hidden within the confines of Bible talk and faith talk and even using Jesus as a source of pride in a sense.

Here’s another strange thing. We say that God loves sinners, so you can even find pride in sin. Someone will talk about doing something just plain evil and then say, “Well, I’m not gonna lie about it.” They will use their honesty of confession as a sense of pride, while not even expressing sorrow over what they’ve done. The whole point of this thing that Paul speaks of us that we would have NOTHING to boast about, even our honest confession of sins! Being a Christian is not dependent on me being less intellectual than someone or poorer than someone. Not does it mean that I need to be more sinful than someone else. God doesn’t choose me because I’m a gun lover or a tree hugger. I can like rock music or opera. I can be a Lions fan, or yes, even a Packers fan. It has nothing to do with that.

No. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him. God purposely chooses the weak in order to display HIS power. Think of the Old Testament lesson - how do you answer a king who thinks he is god and has the power to do whatever he wants? God lets him throw Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego - these three helpless men - into a fiery furnace. The strong and powerful men who carry him up end up being burned alive, but these weak and powerless men end up walking around in the fire with the Angel of the Lord as their protection. They come out without a hair of their head burnt. They don’t even smell like smoke. It takes everything you know about fire and throws nature on it’s head. With this powerful defiance of nature King Nebuchadnezzar then realizes what he would never have believed in a thousand years. The LORD is God.

This is what the cross does most of all. Here we say that our ALMIGHTY God, who came to live in the flesh, died. Here we say that Jesus, God’s HOLY Son, was blamed and punished for the sins of the world. We look at a man who didn’t escape death and say, “He is my escape from death.” God chose us so that we would not find our identity in whether we are poor or rich, powerful or weak, but that we would find our salvation in that God and man on the cross. We may not be the most powerful or wise. We may not all understand science as well as some others, although there are some very intellectual and Christian scientists. We believe in Jesus because of the Holy Spirit, who in a miraculous way enabled us to see Jesus as our God and Savior. It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption.
The whole purpose in tearing us down is to point us to Jesus. All of our wisdom is found in Jesus. He created the world. He paid for the sins of the world. He will end this world. He will raise the world from the dead. He will judge the world. He will recreate the world. All that happens in this sinful and deadly world is still under His control. None of these things can be measured by mathematical equations or observed by scientific study. The only reason we know it and believe it is because God reveals it to us. Why do we believe this? In simple faith. Whether something is good or evil, right or wrong, it all depends on what Jesus has to say to me. It doesn’t matter if it’s more economical for a man to live with a woman prior to marriage. God’s Word says “no.” The Bible doesn’t always make “sense” to us. It may have seemed to make more sense to our feeble human minds for God to just keep the devil out of the Garden of Eden in the first place. But that’s not how God chose to deal with it. It doesn’t matter whether people say I’m born a certain way or not. If God tells me that what I want to do is sinful and I need to repent and resist it, then so be it. In humility I get on my knees and plead for mercy.

Even within the confines of nature and science, it’s always kind of neat how God ends up having the last word. The scientists who were so sure of evolution are confronted with DNA. They thought that the bigger things got the more complex they would be. Yet then DNA came along, and they had to see realization that even in the most simple strand of hair there is a code miles long - something impossible to evolve over time - no matter how many millions of years you were to try and randomly put such a thing together. Maybe the scientists are not so smart, and maybe God isn’t so dumb after all?

But the purpose of this isn’t to see who is smartest and who can crow the loudest. It’s so that we stop trying to trust in ourselves or our wisdom and look outside of ourselves for salvation - to Jesus Christ. There are three defining things that Paul wants us to see in Jesus.

1. Our righteousness. This is a courtroom term - declared not guilty. When we see Jesus we find our reason why God could and should declare us not guilty. He is the One who paid our price. He is the One who was punished on our behalf. He is the evidence God uses for declaring us not guilty. If our price is already paid, then we don’t have to pay the price.

2. Our holiness. My life doesn’t have to be defined by how good or evil I have been. I don’t have to try and impress God with who I am or what I’ve done, even as a Christian. I am already declared holy through faith in Jesus in what He did for me. Christianity is not a “try hard” religion. It is a religion for those who are declared saints already by the blood of Christ.

3. Our redemption. Jesus is the One who volunteered to pay the price for our sins. If He isn’t the One who pays for all of our sins, then we will always feel that we have to suffer in some way. Every time we get a broken arm or a sickness we would wonder, “What have I done to deserve this?” But when Jesus is our redemption, we even realize that death doesn’t pay for our sin, for Jesus already paid the price.

When Jesus is our COMPLETE salvation, then nothing of who we are, where we came from, or what we do makes us holy or righteous in God’s sight. Jesus is our all in all. When I stand before Jesus and you stand before Jesus, and we both claim the same salvation - then there are no distinctions. I will not
look more holy than you. You will not look more holy than me. We will both look the same. Faith in Christ is the great equalizer. We all look holy in the same blood and righteousness of the same Savior.

Therefore, as it is written: “Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” This quote is taken from Jeremiah. He specifically said, “let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight,” declares the LORD. (Je 9:24)

The biggest cry of the atheist is at all of the injustices in the world. If your God is so powerful, then why doesn’t He stop sickness and death? Why doesn’t He do this? Why did He allow that? They are full of angry accusations. I’m not going to try to pretend to know why God does everything He does. But I see a God who voluntarily takes on flesh and dies on the cross for the world? That seems pretty compassionate to me. I know this God created and redeemed me and rose from the dead for me. No matter how rotten this world becomes and what happens to me here and now, I’m good with what God promises me in Jesus. That’s more than enough.

It doesn’t matter whether the elites think I’m a foolish or a rube in the end. It doesn’t matter if they think it is a waste of time to go and bow down to this God and take His body and blood for the forgiveness of sins. Let them call us names and belittle us for our views. Let them viciously fight for their “rights” that lead to more pain and death. I can get angry with them or pray for them. The answer is not to shake the fist or be disrespectful. The answer is to keep consistently and lovingly preaching the message of salvation, “Repent and believe the good news.” There is a great and simple blessing that we receive through faith in knowing that God smiles upon us in Jesus. There is a great blessing in knowing that justice will be served in the end. Let that simple and quiet faith shine forth in these dark and angry times. Amen.