

1 Corinthians

Gospel-Centered Living in a Sin-Centered World

Section 1: Unity and the Gospel

The Power of God's Call

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Introduction

ILLUS: The culture of celebrity – We don't need superstars, because we have a Savior.

"We are often tempted to think that it would be wonderful if such-and-such a great athlete – or brilliant scientist, popular entertainer, or world leader – would become a Christian. But Jesus did not think this way when He chose His disciples." (MacArthur, 51)

Jesus didn't come that way to us and neither will we come that way to Him!

Remember that this section of 1 Corinthians is all about unity in the gospel. There were factions and dissensions in the church at Corinth that were not only keeping them from reaching their gospel potential but were contrary to the gospel and, if uncorrected, would be devastating to the cause of Christ in the culture.

The dissention ultimately found its root in pride

James 4:1 (NKJV) — 1 Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from

your desires for pleasure that war in your members?

This pridefulness was demonstrated in one's preference (I am of Paul, Apollos, Cephas), one's philosophy (Where is the wise, scribe, debater), and today we will see it was demonstrated in one's position.

God Calls the Unlikely (26)

The opening phrase of this verse is better translated "consider your calling." Paul is asking the believers to reflect on who and where they were when Jesus called them.

Regarding God's foolishness being wiser than men and God's weakness being stronger than men ... "Paul moves to his masterful punchline: the Corinthian church's very existence is foolish. Look at yourselves." (Wilson, 17)

ILLUS: Who and where were you? Now look around the room ... who do you see?

"God called them, not because of what they were, but in spite of what they were." (Wiersbe, 571)

God Does Not Call Many Intelligent

Isaiah 55:8-9 (NKJV) — 8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. **9** "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts.

The focus here is not just on the fact that there is a difference in God's thoughts and man's thoughts, but the degree of that difference!

God Does Not Call Many Influential

While the point of this statement relates to power – that power can come in many forms – but often is related to wealth.

ILLUS: Buy Me a Boat by Chris Janson

They call me redneck, white trash and blue collar
But I could change all that if I had a couple million dollars
I keep hearing that money is the root of all evil
And you can't fit a camel through the eye of a needle
I'm sure that's probably true
But it still sounds pretty cool 'Cause it could buy me a boat
It could buy me a truck to pull it

Matthew 19:24 (NKJV) — 24 And again I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.”

God Does Not Call Many Important

“Well born” – pedigree

There were some people of note from a worldly perspective that were part of the church at Corinth (Crispus, Gaius, Erastus, etc.) ... in fact this difference in the pride of social status we will later

see led to other issues in the church related to legal disputes, food sacrificed to idols, and partaking of the Lord's Supper ... but there were not many in the church of such worldly status.

ILLUS: "Their doctrines are most repulsive and strongly tinged with impertinence and disrespect towards their superiors, in perpetually endeavoring to level all ranks, and do away with distinctions. It is monstrous to be told that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl the earth."
(Duchess of Buckingham)

ILLUS: Selina Countess of Huntingdon – to whom George Whitfield was chaplain ... "Through the countess's efforts, over 200 chapels and mission stations were established, and in 1828, 40 years after her death, some 35,000 worshippers attended them. Over 150 men trained for the ministry at her alternative to Oxford and Cambridge, Trevecca House in Breconshire.

(<https://biblemesh.com/blog/i-thank-god-for-the-letter-m/>) said ... I thank God for the letter "M"

But there were not many. And even those, may have become considered "less" by the world when God called them to Himself.

"The irony of the Corinthian believers' present situation is that they are judging Paul and his gospel from this point of view, which, were they to apply it to themselves, would only serve to show how insignificant they really are." (Fee, 84)

But God not only Calls the Unlikely ...

God Chooses the Unimportant (27-29)

Chosen: “places strong emphasis on the sovereignty of God in salvation and leads to the conclusion that the Lord is the only proper object of boasting.” (Taylor, 73)

“The Corinthians (nor any of us) did not stumble onto a great thing in hearing the good news ... rather ‘God chose.’” (Fee, 86)

“Our salvation has its origin and source in the divine will and purpose of God.” (Akin & Merritt, 36)

“Just as the cross reverses human expectations in terms of how the world will be saved, so too God chose to save the most unlikely candidates.” (Schreiner quoted by Akin & Merritt, 36)

God Chooses the Foolish

Moras – moron: “a person who is noticeably stupid”

ILLUS: Joshua at Jericho

God Chooses the Weak

ILLUS: Gideon – found in the wine press hiding to thresh wheat – and then reduced his army from 32,000 to 300.

God Chooses the Insignificant

“People that the world pays no attention to, God notices and uses them greatly for his glory.” (Akin & Merritt, 37)

Deuteronomy 7:7 (NKJV) — 7 The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples

God Chooses the Despised

ILLUS: Trailer Trash and Hood?

God Chooses the Nobodies

“The things which are not” does not indicate a lack of existence but those who are considered “unimportant.”

Was this not true of Abraham, Moses, David, Peter ...

ILLUS: Celsus (2nd Century Greek Philosopher – who wrote *The True Word* as the earliest known comprehensive criticism of Christianity – Wikipedia on Celsus) said of Christianity ... “The following are the rules laid down by them. Let no one come to us who has been instructed, or who is wise or prudent; but if there be any ignorant, or unintelligent, or uninstructed, or foolish person, let them come with confidence.”

ILLUS: Being picked on a kickball team

BUT WHY?

“that no flesh should glory in His presence”

The term “glory” in the NT is often from “doxa” meaning praise, but here it is a different term that better translates as “boast”

This sets the stage for the final two verses because not only does God ... Call the Unlikely and Choose the Unimportant ... if these are not enough to rid us of pride ... we have absolutely no room to boast because ...

God Changes the Unworthy (30-31)

Yet, despite of who you are apart from Christ – “of Him you are in Christ”

“who became for us wisdom from God”

1 Corinthians 1:25 (NKJV) — 25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

Notice that “in Christ” we do not become “wise” – but for us Jesus is wisdom. In Christ, it is not who we become – for that will lead to pride, but who He is – and that leads to praise!

He is Our Wisdom

Colossians 2:3 (NKJV) — 3 in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.

1 Corinthians 2:2 (NKJV) — 2 For I determined not to know anything among you except Jesus Christ and Him crucified.

He is Our Righteousness

Who saved us from the penalty of sin. (imputed)

Isaiah 64:6a (NKJV) — 6a But we are all like an unclean thing, And all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags ...

2 Corinthians 5:21 (NKJV) — 21 For He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.

He is Our Sanctification

Who saves us from the power of sin. (imparted)

John 17:19 (NKJV) — 19 And for their sakes I sanctify Myself, that they also may be sanctified by the truth.

1 Peter 2:9–10 (NKJV) — 9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; **10** who once were not a people but are now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

He is Our Redemption

Who will save us from the presence of sin.
(implanted)

“This particular Greek word occurs in the New Testament ten times, and every time it refers to the

future, and not to the past or the present.” (G. Campbell Morgan, 39)

Eschatological – referring to being purchased and freed from slavery.

Colossians 1:13–14 (NKJV) — 13 He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, **14** in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins.

Because of this wisdom of God on our behalf – our boast can only be in the Lord.

Paul quotes there the prophet Jeremiah

Jeremiah 9:23–24 (NKJV) — 23 Thus says the LORD: “Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; **24** But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight,” says the LORD.

In regard to salvation – man’s wisdom says DO but God’s wisdom says Done, man’s wisdom says TRY but God’s wisdom says TRUST, man’s wisdom says BEHAVE but God’s wisdom says BELIEVE, man’s wisdom says ACHIEVE and God’s wisdom says ACCEPT! (Adapted from Phillips, 45)

Conclusion

Paul, using the people of the church in Corinth as examples, proves that God Calls the Unlikely, Chooses the Unimportant, and Changes the Unworthy.

And still the same is true some 2,000 years later ... “it is very obvious that the weak things of the world have shamed the strong and that divine foolishness is wiser than human wisdom ... The cross – a stark symbol that was supposed to mean Roma Victor – has come to mean Christus Victor. Those the ancient world regarded as heroes have become villains, and the crucified criminal has become the most admired and worshipped figure in history ... By dying the death of a slave and then rising again, Jesus brought honor to the most apparently shameful people in society. He confounded the intelligence of the intelligent while elevating humility above pride.” (Wilson, 23)

Paul would later say it this way ... if there was anything in me for which I would boast, even that would boasting in the Lord, because

2 Corinthians 12:9 (NKJV) — 9 He said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

The Power of God’s Call in our lives is based on our ability to reason, or how robust our power, or any perceived righteousness – but because we have none of these things – it is to a relationship with Christ who is all of those things.

The cross is that which levels the playing field because regardless of one's intelligence, influence, or importance from a worldly perspective ...

Romans 3:22b–27 (NKJV) — 22b ... For there is no difference; **23** for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, **24** being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, **25** whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith, to demonstrate His righteousness, because in His forbearance God had passed over the sins that were previously committed, **26** to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus. **27** Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? Of works? No, but by the law of faith.

I am just a Nobody trying to tell Everybody about Somebody who can save Anybody!

Galatians 6:14 (NKJV) — 14 But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.