

Life Together

*Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you?
If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him.
For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.
(1 Corinthians 3:16-17. ESV)*

*And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same
image from one degree of glory to another. For this comes from the Lord who is the Spirit.
(2 Corinthians 3:18. ESV)*

Consider Your Calling

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1 Corinthians 1:26-31

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Introduction:

Good morning! Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 1:26. You will remember from last week that the Apostle Paul has been making an argument about the importance of church unity, what builds it and what threatens it. Threatening the unity of the church in Corinth is the fact that they've been arguing over things that have nothing to do with how people come to Christ. They weren't arguing over doctrine, they weren't throwing down over the issue of the Virgin Birth or substitutionary atonement or effectual calling – no they were arguing about the merits of classical rhetoric and the importance of charismatic leadership in the church. And Paul reminds them that such things had nothing to do with how they came to Christ. They were saved because the Gospel washed over them and the Holy Spirit worked within them. That's how they came to Christ – that's how everybody comes to Christ so they need to stop arguing about things that don't matter. He presses that point home now by reminding them of the nature of their conversion; he tells them to consider their own calling.

We'll read verses 26-29 in order to understand what Paul is saying about their conversion and then we'll read verses 30-31 where Paul brings this section of his argument to a close. Hear now the Word of the Lord:

²⁶ 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. ²⁷ 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;²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are,²⁹ so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Corinthians 1:26–29 ESV)

This is the Word of the Lord, thanks be to God.

Paul wants them to think about how they came to Christ and he wants them to be reminded of 4 things.

Consider Your Calling:

First of all he says, I want you to remember that:

1. The will of God was primary and determinative in your salvation

Three times he tells them “God chose”. But God chose! Why are you a Christian friend? Why did you see what your brother did not see? Why do you believe what your neighbour does not believe? Why will you inherit the kingdom of God and the riches of heaven when so many others eat, drink, are merry and then die and enter into an eternal darkness apart from the goodness of God? Why are you a Christian? Because God chose. God chose. Did you choose Christ? Yes – but only because God chose you first – God has to go first! No one chooses Christ unless God directs their eyes. This doctrine is such a rebuke to our own stubborn pride that you must not accept it simply because I say so – accept it because the Apostle Paul says it THREE TIMES in this one paragraph, but also accept it because Jesus himself said it long before the Apostle Paul. In Matthew 11:25 he prayed to the Father saying:

²⁵“I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that **you have hidden** these things from the wise and understanding **and revealed them** to little children; ²⁶yes, Father, **for such was your gracious will**. ²⁷All things have been handed over to me by my Father, and no one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and **anyone to whom the Son chooses to reveal him**. (Matthew 11:25–27 ESV)

Oh Father, Jesus prays: “You have hidden! You have revealed! You have chosen and I thank you!” Can you thank God for the doctrine of election this morning? Without it you would still be in the dark, still a captive to your own pride and rebellion and headed for an eternity in hell. Can you thank God that HE CHOSE YOU? Some of us grudgingly accept the doctrine of election only because its found on just about every page of Scripture – we grudgingly accept it

and I rebuke that this morning in Jesus' name. I rebuke your grudging acceptance and I rebuke my own grudging acceptance. Jesus thanked God for this doctrine. So who are you to hold it at arms length and say: "Well this is just Calvinism and Calvin wasn't Jesus" – no my friend, don't do that! John Calvin didn't invent election, Augustine didn't invent election, the Apostle Paul didn't invent election – JESUS INVENTED ELECTION! Jesus knew that this was the only way that stubborn sinners would repent and believe and be saved and Jesus thanked God for this way of salvation because it rescues sinners and magnifies the grace of God so don't you dare grudgingly accept it. You love it, you thank God for it, because without it you'd be dead. Without it your loved ones would have no hope in this world. God is primary in the miracle of salvation. His will comes first; that's why you are a Christian.

You must know that to be true. I know that to be true. I was born to two people who had only recently come to faith in Christ. I didn't have any influence over where I was born – God never asked me whether I'd like to be Canadian or Pakistani. He never asked me whether I'd like to be born to Christians or atheists. He never asked me whether I'd like to be born to new Christians still freshly excited about the Gospel or third generation Christians would had lost their first love. He just put me where I was sure to hear the Gospel from people who were excited about it. Then he put me in a church that preached the Gospel and believed in the Bible. Then he sent me to a little old lady's house where she was having DVBS in her back yard. That little old lady told me the Gospel on the stairs leading down to her basement and as soon as I heard it God strengthened my heart to believe. That's how I became a Christian! What in that story has anything to do with me? Almost nothing. The will of God was primary. The action of God was determinative. God came first. That's how it was for me and I bet if you think carefully and humbly, if you consider your own calling, that's how it was for you too. God is primary in the miracle of your salvation.

Secondly Paul says, I want you to remember that:

2. God's choice had nothing to do with your merits

Not many of you were wise, not many of you were powerful, not many of you were of noble birth. See, its not like God went around recruiting the best and the brightest in order to populate the kingdom of God – that's not how it happened. Whatever the reasons for God's choice it was

explicitly NOT based upon any merit or inherent superiority in you. You were alarmingly AVERAGE people before the grace of God in Christ took hold of you.

Listen, I don't know why God chose me – you don't know why God chose you. But one thing I do know, it had nothing to do with any merit or superiority within us. You shouldn't need to be convinced of that, Paul says, I mean, look around you! On the sly, right now, look at the person beside you. These are not impressive people, humanly speaking! If God were choosing his team based on merit then God needs to fire himself and get a proper General Manager because this group is seriously minor league. Our team picture should not feed your pride according to the flesh Paul says. It does however, serve very nicely, the cause of God's glory and grace.

That's the third thing that he wants them to remember:

3. God's choice serves the end of God's glory alone

Look at verses 28-29 again:

²⁸ God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, ²⁹ **so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.** (1 Corinthians 1:28–29 ESV)

If you want to know why God chose you then this is the closest thing to an answer that you will find in the Bible: so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. That's the reason or as close as you're going to get to one. One commentator put it this way:

God's ultimate aim in his activity of choosing, shaming and nullifying is to preclude all human boasting. The critical purpose of God's action of exalting the foolish and lowering the proud is that no one can sing his or her own praises in the presence of God.¹

I told you last week that God's glory is a good test of your theology. If your understanding of the Gospel and your understanding of how you came to faith glorifies you for believing or anyone else for their role in sharing the Gospel with you then your theology is seriously defective. You took a wrong turn somewhere and you need to go back, repent and begin again. Good theology

¹Roy E. Ciampa and Brian S. Rosner, *The First Letter to the Corinthians*, Pillar New Testament Commentary. Accordance electronic ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 107.

ends in the glory of God alone. The Gospel is actually designed to rob men of boasting. By the way, think about why that might be. How was the universe designed? Well the universe was designed with the biggest thing in the middle – kind of like our solar system. We put the sun in the middle because it's the biggest thing. Every smaller thing revolves around the biggest thing and as a result, everything runs tickity boo. If we put a smaller thing – say like Jupiter – in the spot for the big thing then everything goes to hell in a hand basket as orbits warp and objects collide to ill effect. That's the way God created the universe – the **BIGGEST THING GOES IN THE MIDDLE**. God of course, is the biggest thing. The universe works really well when God is **CENTRAL**, when God's word is the frame and foundation for all reality. Now, how did the universe go awry? When men and women tried to de-god God. When they tried to be **LIKE GOD** deciding right and wrong for themselves. The universe went out of whack when a small thing tried to be the biggest thing at the centre of it all. So then, doesn't it make perfect sense that as God restores the universe he injects a recreative virus called the Gospel that makes men small and God big? How else would he do it? That's what the Gospel is supposed to do – it makes men small and God big. If you go home from church and you don't feel small – you went to the wrong church! If you went to a church that told you how big you are, how much potential you have, how your words have **POWER** over the cosmos – **RUN FOR YOUR LIFE!** That's the devil's church! That's not a Gospel church! In a Gospel church you go home feeling small and you go home with a big, big, wonderful God, who is large and in charge and greatly to be praised. That's how new creation works! That's what the Gospel does! There will be no contenders for the throne of God in the new heaven and the new earth. Only very ordinary people, saved, sanctified and redeemed by the Sovereign Grace of God.

That's the conclusion Paul has been driving toward; let me read it to you in verses 30-31.

³⁰ And because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption,³¹ so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord."
(1 Corinthians 1:30-31 ESV)

Where Then Is Boasting?

You didn't come to Christ because of worldly methods. You didn't come to Christ because of charismatic leaders. Why then do you exult in such things? The word Paul uses in verse 31 means to boast or to glory in. It doesn't mean exactly the same as our word "boast" which in our

minds is a synonym for brag. Paul isn't saying: "Why do you brag about methods and why do you brag about leaders", rather he is saying: "You are making too much out of these things. You are making small things into big things. There is only one big thing and it is God." Do you want to magnify something? Do you want to amplify something? Magnify God, amplify God – glorify God because God is the biggest thing. He's the reason you're a Christian. That's what he says in verse 30:

because of him you are in Christ Jesus (ESV)

God is the reason you are saved. It was his idea, it was HIS WILL – HE CHOSE YOU FROM BEFORE THE FOUNDATION OF THE WORLD. You want to talk about something? Talk about that.

Do you want to get excited about someone, about a leader? Get excited about Jesus. He's the only one that matters – he's the one who gives you everything you have and everything you ever will have. Get excited about Jesus:

who became to us wisdom from God, righteousness and sanctification and redemption

The grammar there suggests that Jesus is 1 thing in 3 parts, rather than 4 things. Meaning that Paul is not saying that Jesus is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification and redemption – 4 things – rather he is saying that Jesus is wisdom from God. He is God's way of salvation, he is God's plan for making us new creation. From him we receive three things that make us new creation: righteousness, sanctification and redemption. It might be easier to think of that as salvation, sanctification and freedom. Its from Jesus that you got everything you have, everything you are getting and everything you will get at the consummation of all things. He is your everything so forget about Paul, forget about Peter, forget about Apollos and get excited about Jesus. He's everything – put the spotlight on him! Make him the centre – put God in the centre and all those smaller things will fall back into their proper orbit and the chaos in your church will return to cosmos and community for the glory of God and the good of all people.

That's the conclusion of Paul's argument – at least this section of it, but for this to be a proper sermon we need to spend some time responding to the text. Its not enough for us to understand

what Paul said to them, we also need to reflect upon what God is saying TO US through what Paul said to them. Let me suggest 4 appropriate responses to the teaching of this text for us as individuals and for us as a church.

Responding To The Text:

First of all:

1. Let's continue to choose our arguments carefully and to engage in them sparingly

There is a place for arguing in the church. The Apostle Paul would throw down on matters of doctrine. This is the guy who confronted the Apostle Peter to his face in Galatia, before everyone, in a church meeting when Peter made an error with respect to the Gospel. This is the guy, the Apostle Paul, who ends this very letter, 1 Corinthians by saying:

²² If anyone has no love for the Lord, let him be accursed. Our Lord, come! ²³ (1 Corinthians 16:22 ESV)

Paul is clearly not afraid of confrontation if its necessary to preserve the Gospel, but he has no time for conflict and for quarrelling when Gospel issues are not at stake. This whole section of the Corinthian correspondence came about because they were arguing about stuff they shouldn't have been arguing about. Methods and personality are not Gospel level issues; they have nothing to do with how people come to Christ so we're not going to focus on them and we're not going to fight about them in the church.

I'm not saying this by way of rebuke, I'm actually saying it by way of commendation, that's why the heading is "let's continue to choose our arguments carefully and to engage in them sparingly" – this is actually something that this church, by the grace of God, does very well. Let me give you an example. A number of years ago we became aware that the two service format here was not working. It wasn't that there is something inherently wrong about two services – lots of churches have two services; it's a great way to make maximum use of your space – the problem was that we had two services with two distinct worship styles and as a result, we became two very different congregations trying hard to stay together. The board talked about it and decided that a change was necessary but because we thought that people would fight and argue and divide

over the stylistic compromises that would be required, we set a 5 year timeline for the change. I remember James Houser and I sitting in Tim Hortons trying to plot out how long it would take to make the switch to a single worship style and we both agreed that it could not be done peacefully in less than 5 years.

5 years – that was the plan. Then a funny thing happened, senior after senior started coming to us saying that they too sensed the need for a change. They knew that it would be better for the church if we all worshipped together. The board started thinking that maybe it could be done in 3 years rather than 5. Then about 6 months down the road one of our seniors came to us with a story that turned the tide. He said that he had been at the bank and had overheard a young fellow in front of him saying something that led him to believe that the young man was a Christian. So he asked him where he attended church. The young man replied: “I go to First Baptist.” “First Baptist?” the senior asked, “I’ve been going there for 50 years! How come I’ve never seen you?” “I don’t know”, the young man replied. “My wife and I are there sitting together every Sunday. Are you sure you go to the same First Baptist that we go to?” Right away the older man realized the time had come for a change and he came to one of us – I don’t remember which one - and he told us to make it happen. “We should know the people we go to church with”, he said, “even if it means that we don’t get to sing all our favourite songs.” That’s a man who doesn’t make small things into big things. That’s a man who knows what matters and what doesn’t and his counsel turned the tide on that issue. We made the move about 6 months later – 4 years ahead of schedule and God has blessed us ever since, in part, I think, because we chose our arguments very carefully. The Board didn’t force disruptive change over a non-Gospel issue, and the seniors didn’t resist change over non-Gospel issues. That’s good church. That’s the sign of a church that gets the Gospel. Let’s continue to choose our arguments carefully and to engage in them very sparingly.

2. Let’s always right-size our leaders

Part of the problem in Corinth is that they were over-emphasizing the impact and importance of gifted and charismatic leaders. Some were in the Peter camp, some were in the Apollos camp and some were in the Paul camp. “You need to all be in the Jesus camp!” Paul says, none of those human leaders, ultimately had anything to do with how you came to Christ. They were tools and agents nothing more.

Can I speak very candidly for a moment? Most good pastors are secretly very concerned that their people not mistake their ministry for Christ's generous supply. Here is what I mean by that, many people will say to their pastor, if he's a good pastor who ministers out of the Word: "What you said, or what you wrote or what you have taught me has blessed me more than you will ever know. You have made a difference in my life." A good pastor is unsure what to do with those kinds of statements because a good pastor is just a hose. He is just a tube through which comes the water of life. What you love, friends, what gives you life and brings forth fruit in your soul and in your character is not the hose, it's the water in the hose and it's the well of eternal life from which the water comes. Now, a good pastor isn't looking to be dishonoured – he wouldn't want you to spit in his coffee or key his car on your way out of the parking lot today – I'm not saying that, I'm just saying that a good pastor is just happy to be saved. He's happy to have been called by God and to be used. Direct your praise and your gratitude toward Christ alone.

3. Let us accept the scandal of the Gospel and the offence of the church

Paul's argument suggests that neither the message of the Gospel nor the make up of the church is attractive to the unregenerate man. The message is offensive and the church is unremarkable. We need to hear that. In the ears of the unsaved person our message seems is offensive. To the eyes of the unsaved person our church seems unremarkable. You can't change that – don't waste your time trying to change that. That's actually part of the plan; that serves the glory of God alone.

That's why the whole seeker thing is an exercise in futility. We can't dress up the church with smoke machines and secular music and hip looking, goatee wearing pastors and fool people into thinking that the church is actually cool. Its not. The church is not cool. Its message is offensive and its people are ordinary. So let's just let it go. The cool train has passed us by. We don't have cool – what we have is the power of God for salvation to all who believe. Let's go with that, let's build around that and let's not obscure that with methods and efforts that actually work against the goal of the Gospel.

Lastly,

4. Let's pursue the glory of God alone

God needs to be big for the good of men and women. Our goal as a church ought to be to make God big and everyone else small. Let's do that! Why would we do anything else? That's what's wrong with the universe – we've got small stuff in the God-spot and everything is going crazy, everything is knocking into everything else and things are spinning out of control! What's the answer to that? The Gospel is the answer to that! The Gospel makes God big and people small. The Gospel says that God made the world and has the right to tell everybody in it how to live. That right there is a kick in the pants isn't it? That makes God bigger than we want him to be and us smaller than we want to be. The Gospel says that we're all sinners and not only that but we're all DEAD in our trespasses and sins. We can't save ourselves. The Gospel is a story about a God who saves people out of a ditch. That's a story about a big God and some small people. Don't change that story. I know some of you find that story – even as believers – a little bit offensive to human dignity. You want our role to be a little more glorified than that. Listen to me. It isn't. Maybe you've forgot who you were before God in Christ had mercy on you. Maybe you need to remember your calling this morning. Maybe you need a remind of you would be apart from the grace of God. Because the truth is we were dead in our trespasses and sins. We were lost and without hope in this world until God in Christ had mercy on us. God is big. And you are small and that actually, is very helpful for you to know. When you know that and you submit to that the Big Thing settles into the centre and you return to your proper orbit and everything else falls into place. Listen, we preach the glory of God in this place for two reasons. Number 1 – its true. And number 2 – its helpful. You need to know that you are not the centre of the universe. The glory of God is good for men and women. That's the truth. That's helpful and this is the Word of the Lord – thanks be to God.