

Sermon Notes of Rev.Dr.I.J.W.Oakley (25-10-1998 Guisborough Evangelical Church)

1 Corinthians 1:26-31  
Additional Reading: Jeremiah 9:23-24

Introduction

Paul continues with the same theme, and is concerned to lift God high and put man in his place – the dust. We need to be God-centred, not man-centred. The whole emphasis is never mind self, take eyes off self, look at God, and see what God has done. There is no place to be confident and sure of self. Put confidence in God. Find all in all in Christ.

Now from looking at the way of salvation as that which exalts God, Paul turns to the people who are saved. God chooses and calls a people. The very people that God chooses exalts God, shows His greatness and glory.

Source of the Christian life

Remember Paul's argument was to magnify God and His greatness and glory. Totally indebted to Him. He demonstrated that Christians are where they are and have what they have thanks to God alone.

The human side of conversion is repentance towards God and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. But now here is God's side. The sovereign and powerful call of God Himself, through Christ. The point is that God has gone out of His way to choose the nonentities.

**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** (1 Corinthians 1:26). With few exceptions, noblemen, philosophers, business executives, gentry, people in corridors of power, were all absent from this and every other church. **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; he chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things and the things that are not – to nullify the things that are** (1 Corinthians 1:27,28). It is the scum of the earth He has chosen, and made His priests and kings. He has completely reversed human values. The world has put on a pedestal the high and the great. And God has turned the whole situation upside down and exalted and chosen sheer nobodies. This is true in every age.

Few people in the New Testament church were of social importance. The proconsul, Sergius Paulus (Acts 13:7), Dionysius, a member of the Areopagus (Acts 17:34), prominent women of Thessalonica (Acts 17:4,12), Erastus, the city treasurer of Corinth (Acts 19:22; Romans 16:23), and Paul himself, were of massive intellect. In the time of Nero, Pomponia Graecina, wife of Aulus Plautius (conqueror of Britain) was martyred for her Christianity. But by and large, slaves made up the bulk of church membership. Celsus (178AD) sneered at Christians because they were ignorant, uncultured, wool dressers, cobblers, fullers, and uneducated and vulgar persons.

During the eighteenth century revival, one of the leaders was Countess of Huntingdon, a woman of great wealth who built churches and a college at Trefeca near Brecon. She opened her drawing room to London society, including the Prince of Wales, the Duke of Cumberland, and Lord North, to hear the Gospel. She said she was always glad of the letter “m” in Paul’s statement here, “Not *many* wise, mighty and noble...”, i.e. she was glad he did not say “Not *any* wise, mighty and noble..” But the revival was mainly among the poorest and most degraded and immoral, the Bristol colliers and slum-dwellers, Cornish smugglers, London drunkards, Liverpool dockers and sailors, and wild starving blasphemers of Newcastle-upon-Tyne.

So it is today in every place. God, in doing so, upsets the estimation and opinion of the world. He does not bow the knee to men. Intent on breaking empty human pride, He reverses men’s judgement. Turns the whole reckoning of the world on its head. He works miracles with hopeless materials. And shows that if men are saved it is because of His power and wisdom alone. Human position, intellect, power, merit and works count for nothing with Him. **So that no one may boast before Him** (1 Corinthians 1:29). No flesh, no human being should boast and glory and preen himself in the presence of God.

By nature we are very proud. We are quick to assert self and insist on being recognised. God snaps His fingers at it all. It is not till we face the fact that we only deserve judgment and hell, that we are utterly helpless and weak, and that if we are saved it is because of grace and mercy alone, that the real Christian experience begins. That is a step lower than most men are prepared to take. But it is the only way.

God’s choosing the weak and foolish and helpless is a platform to display His grace and power. We contribute nothing to salvation except sins, from which we need to be saved.

Two contrasting positions – self-sufficiency of the self-made self-righteous man of the world, or salvation which is wholly of God. His choosing in eternity past, His gift of His Son to do all that was necessary, new birth by His Spirit, called by His grace, kept by the His power till we are brought safely to heaven and home at the end. **It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus** (1 Corinthians 1:30), i.e. God is the source of everything in your life through Christ Jesus. At the end of the day, it is not my choice of Him, but His choice of me which is at the root of it.

#### Sufficiency of the Christian life

**You are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption** (1 Corinthians 1:30). God’s wisdom in Christ has given us, firstly, righteousness to justify us. Through Christ’s atoning death, and with His righteousness imputed and credited to us, we are justified, freed from condemnation, and in right relationship with God.

Secondly, He gives us holiness to sanctify us. Not just outwardly reformed but totally renovated. Spiritually alive. Our understanding is given light in the Lord, our will is at one with God’s will, our affections are on things above, our conscience is enlightened.

We have holiness in heart and life. We partake of the divine nature. Christ is formed within. The old has passed away and all things are new.

And thirdly, the redemption of our bodies to glorify us. When Christ comes again our bodies are to be redeemed and changed (Romans 8:23). **You were sealed for the day of redemption** (Ephesians 4:30). When He appears we shall be like Him in complete perfection. Have a body like His resurrection body. Completion of God's saving purposes.

There is wonderful provision for us in Christ. It covers past sin, present helplessness, and future fear. **Complete in Him** (Colossians 2:10).

*“My never failing treasury filled  
With boundless stores of grace”  
(John Newton)*

We have all we need in Christ Jesus. What folly to rely on human wisdom and schemes and devices. Where else can we be accepted with God, changed in heart, and safe for eternity? What fools we are to look to ourselves when we have such a rich and sufficient provision for us in Christ Jesus.

A.B.Simpson went to New York to hear D.L.Moody preach. He put his hat under his seat and waited. The crowds came in, and half an hour before the start of the service, hymn singing began. Simpson got restless, time was passing so slowly, and he had come on a long journey to hear D.L.Moody, not for all this hymn singing. Then the person leading the singing announced yet another hymn, the first three words of which were “Jesus is enough”. This hit Simpson between the eyes. Stunned, he picked up his hat and walked out. He never heard D.L.Moody, but his life was completely revolutionized. He became a mighty vessel in God's hands. He had found the secret in those three words.

Have you made this personal discovery of the truth? That Jesus is enough. Are you filled with all the fullness of God? Have you found Jesus is enough – your everything and your all, for time and eternity? Have you made that discovery? Then see how all self-confidence, self-righteousness, self-glorification and self-reliance of the man of the world is an utter abomination before the Almighty God, and total nonsense. But note that the reverse of self-glorification is not man-centred negative grovelling, but positive boasting in the Lord.

#### Satisfaction of the Christian life

All this has happened and all blessings are showered on us so that if anyone is going to boast and glory, **Let him who boasts boast in the Lord** (1 Corinthians 1:31, quoting Jeremiah 9:24). This is one thing which satisfies the Christian – to boast in the Lord. Unbelievers try to find satisfaction in self – what I've done, how important and valuable I am, what God owes me... But the Christian wants to boast in the Lord. He owes all to God. There we were, helpless, under condemnation, and God has done everything for us – provided a saviour, given new birth, enriched us with His power and wisdom and strength, given us dignity and status, and freedom in His Son. We

can hold our head up in the world and walk without fear, all because of God's dealing with us in Christ.

**May I never boast except in the cross of Christ of our Lord Jesus Christ** (Galatians 6:14). When we boast in Christ, we can never exaggerate. We can never exceed His worth, never go too far.

On the first anniversary of his conversion, May 1739, Charles Wesley penned the hymn

*“Oh, for a thousand tongues to sing  
My great Redeemer's praise”*

inspired by the words of Peter Bohler, “If I had a thousand tongues I would praise Him with them all”.

Then there are the words of Joseph Grigg's hymn, *Jesus and shall it ever be*, which goes on to say

*“Ashamed of Jesus – yes I may  
When I've no guilt to wash away,  
No tear to wipe, no good to crave,  
No fears to quell, no soul to save.  
Till then, nor is my boasting vain,  
Till then I'll boast a Saviour slain,  
And o may this my glory be  
That Christ is not ashamed of me”*

### Conclusion

We are all natural boasters, but in whom do we boast? Ourselves, or the Lord? Whom do we rely on and depend on? Have you discovered yet that you are empty and unworthy and useless? Full provision has been made for us in Christ. Complete turning away from self and finding all in Christ.

**Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's almighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time** (1 Peter 5:6). **Seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near** (Isaiah 55:6). The requirements – to humbles selves, seek the Lord and call on Him. This is so alien to proud, strong men who are wise in their own eyes. But be clear that this is the only way to be saved and to be a Christian and right with God.