

The Foolishness of the Cross, Part 2  
1 Corinthians 1:26-31  
September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Discussion/Reflection Questions

1. \_\_\_\_\_ the insignificant (1:26-29)

2. \_\_\_\_\_ in Christ (1:30)

3. \_\_\_\_\_ only in the Lord (1:31)

1. Read Jeremiah 9:23-24.
  - a. What are you tempted to “boast” in? What are your strengths that can become a source of personal pride?
  - b. According to Jeremiah 9:24, what specifically are we to “boast” in?
  - c. Why would Paul close this section by quoting this passage? In other words, how does it relate to his main point?
2. How do you see a similar pattern of reversal in Mary’s song found in Luke 1:46-55?
3. In what way does God’s choice of “not many wise, etc.” shame the wise and powerful?
4. Why is it significant that it is “by HIS doing that you are in Christ?” In other words, what is *excluded* by that statement?
5. In what way do we have each of the following because we are “in Christ” according to 1:30?
  - a. Righteousness (2 Corinthians 5:21; Philippians 3:9)
  - b. Sanctification (Romans 6:19-22; 1 Thessalonians 4:3-7)
  - c. Redemption (Colossians 1:14)
6. Take some time to reflect on the prepositions in Galatians 2:20 (with, in, by, for). How does each of those explain our union with Christ?
7. How do the concepts in 1:26-31 relate to the bigger point in chapters 1-4 of avoiding division?

## The Foolishness of the Cross, Part 2

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

September 27<sup>th</sup>, 2020

Big idea: God's choice of "nobodies" shames the "somebodies" of the world.

### Intro

What makes you feel valuable, successful, or significant?

Being good at something – athlete, musician, student, mechanic, business

Having certain possessions – a nicer phone, car, home

Making people laugh

Education – you finish the tests first, you get the best grades, you got into the right program

Professional achievement – Top 40 under 40 for your field, quickly promoted

Family success – Take any of those above categories and apply them to your children, *that's* what makes you feel successful

None of those are bad in themselves. We can be grateful for success, for opportunities for development, influence, and achievement. The problem is when those become what we boast in, trust in, live for, base our identity on, focus our hearts, minds, and affections on.

The problem also comes when those strengths become points of division.

Athletes look down on non-athletes

The middle class look down on the poor

The funny mock the serious

The serious scowl at the funny as frivolous

The educated look down on uneducated

Church bodies ought to include a diverse range of people with many different strength, weaknesses, backgrounds, and cultures. Too often they don't. Or if they do they split into various factions within over these characteristics.

We're in the middle of an section on divisions in 1 Corinthians. How do we combat divisions?

Clear understanding of the unique work of Jesus

Clear understanding of the necessary work of Jesus to bring us to God

Today's passage: Clear understanding that we do not merit, earn, or in any way deserve the favor that God has shown us.

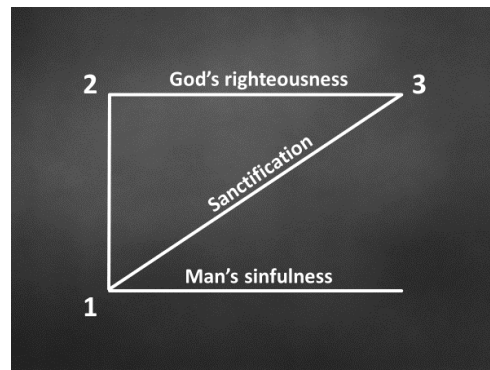
### 1. **Choosing** the insignificant (1:26-29)

- a. As a demonstration of the way in which the foolishness of God is wiser than men and the weakness of God is stronger than men, Paul brings up their own calling from less than mighty positions.
  - i. Not only is the message "foolish" to the Jews and Greeks, so is the very makeup of the body.
- b. Human wisdom says, "God should save the powerful, mighty, and influential because then others will follow."
  - i. And yet God often turns that on its head.
  - ii. He did with Israel

1. **Deuteronomy 7:6-8** "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup> "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples, <sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.
- c. Paul reminds the Corinthians that most of them did not fall into categories considered significant by the culture.
- i. They weren't wise, mighty (influential, powerful), or noble according to the flesh – meaning, by common cultural values.
  - ii. Our church may not say the same thing – in a college town in a prosperous country with many middle class and upper middle class people, many of you may be "wise according to the flesh" or mighty.
    1. The point is still the same – *so what?*
    2. That human success is not what will drive the gospel forward. It does not impress God and will not convert hearts. God often works through the lowly and seemingly insignificant.
  - iii. Just under a year ago I was in Azerbaijan teaching a group of pastors and church leaders. One day we visited some of the locations in which we serve. We drove out to an area known for its cheese production and visited a small family that is the backbone of the tiny local church in their village. The family is a single mom and 5 or 6 kids. She and the kids came to Christ a few years ago and live in abject poverty. The walls of their home are made out of packed straw and earth with some plaster around the outside that is deteriorating. No indoor bathroom and the outhouse needs to be moved because it is in danger of tipping over.
    1. They aren't "wise, mighty, or noble" from a human perspective.
    2. The capital city of Baku has a lot of oil wealth, sky scrapers, and power. The powerbrokers in Baku wouldn't know this family exists and likely wouldn't care.
    3. But they are loved by God.
- d. It doesn't mean God never saves from these categories.
- i. Selina Hastings, Countess of Huntingdon (1707-1791): Blessed be God, it does not say "any mighty," "any noble"; it says "many mighty," "many noble." I owe my salvation to the letter "m." If it had been "not any noble," where would the countess have been?
  - ii. Paul himself would have been considered "wise" as a rising scholar being trained by a prominent rabbi.
    1. **Philippians 3:4-8** although I myself might have confidence even in the flesh. If anyone else has a mind to put confidence in the flesh, I far more: <sup>5</sup> circumcised the eighth day, of the nation of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the Law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup> as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless. <sup>7</sup> But whatever things were gain to me, those things I have counted as loss for the sake of Christ. <sup>8</sup> More than that, I count all things to be loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and count them but rubbish so that I may gain Christ,
- e. But God has chosen primarily to work through those with less power to shame the wise and powerful.
- i. Weak is the opposite of mighty

- ii. Base is the opposite of noble – the Greek words behind them make it really clear.
    - 1. Noble is *eugenys* – good genes – where the term eugenics comes from
    - 2. Base is *agenys* – common, low born
  - iii. Despised is the opposite of esteemed.
  - iv. Celsus in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century: Their injunctions are like this. “Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly.” By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and children.
    - 1. Not what Paul was actually saying but it does show the way some have viewed Christianity when it thrives among the poor and marginalized.
  - v. He has chosen to work through the things that “are not” – not wise, mighty, noble.
2. **Saving** in Christ (1:30)
- a. “But” – a contrast – not your wisdom, might, nobility –
  - b. *But by His doing* you are in Christ Jesus
    - i. Even if you are richer, wiser, mightier than average – that is not why God saved you.
    - ii. That was the point of the calling of God emphasized last week – yes, we believed and called on Christ we are called to Him.
    - iii. You did not place yourself in Christ, you were placed in Christ.
    - iv. **1 Peter 1:3** Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His great mercy has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,
    - v. Christianity is not first or primarily about imperatives but indicatives.
      - 1. Not “you must ...” but “look at what Jesus has done for you.”
  - c. Prepositions carry a lot of meaning – you are IN Christ – united with Christ
    - i. Marriage unites a man and a woman as one
      - 1. When Sarah and I married with one year of college left, I brought student loan debt into the marriage while she came in debt free. The moment she said, “I do” she got a husband and debt. We were united.
    - ii. When we are saved – when we trust in Christ – we are united with Him. We bring our debt, He brings His wealth of righteousness. Our debt is forgiven and His righteousness is given to us.
    - iii. Galatians 2:20 helps us see the gospel through the prepositions:
      - 1. **Galatians 2:20** “I have been crucified **with** Christ; and it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives **in** me; and the *life* which I now live **in** the flesh I live **by** faith **in** the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself up **for** me.
    - iv. On the one hand, he reminds them that from a human perspective they were not considered significant. And it wasn’t because of some quality of theirs that God saved them. But then He emphasizes what they do have.
      - 1. The good news is that what we have in Christ is not earned so it cannot be lost, it wasn’t achieved by us so it cannot but taken away.

2. A child who feels like they are only loved and accepted at home because they are a “good kid” will obey but only out of fear and will live without security. But a child that knows they are loved not for what they do but simply because they are part of the family – they are their father’s daughter or son, they are their mother’s daughter or son – will be secure.
- d. 4 things about the work of Christ are highlighted here: wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, redemption.
- i. Wisdom
    1. It’s not human wisdom that will get me to God, but Jesus.
    2. It’s in Jesus that are all the “treasures of wisdom and knowledge.”
    3. His teaching and example are the greatest sources for human wisdom on how to live life skillfully.
  - ii. Righteousness
    1. **2 Corinthians 5:21** He made Him who knew no sin to be sin on our behalf, so that we might become the righteousness of God in Him.
    2. **Philippians 3:9** and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,
  - iii. Sanctification
    1. To be set apart in personal holiness.
    2. Spurgeon, “Let Jesus always be the motive for your sanctification. Is it not a strange thing that some professors should look to Christ alone for pardon and justification, and run away to Moses when they desire sanctification?”



- 3.
  4. In our justification, we are moved from line 1 to line 2. In our sanctification we grow along line 3.
    - a. But that is empowered and enabled by our union with Jesus, not the fear of falling headlong into hell.
- iv. Redemption
1. Term refers to buying back a slave or captive through payment of a ransom.
    - a. Israel was redeemed – rescued – from slavery in Egypt to freedom
    - b. NT slaves could purchase their freedom out of an indentured servitude
  2. **Colossians 1:14** in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.

3. **Ephesians 1:7** In Him we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of His grace

a. That bondage is to our sin, but it's paid so we are redeemed.

3. **Boasting** only in the Lord (1:31)

a. You may or may not be wise, influential, or of high status – you may be a star athlete, rising professor, upper socio-economic level (and those aren't bad things – they are things to be grateful for and even enjoy) – but what we boast in and what is most significant is that Christ is our wisdom, sanctification, and redemption.

i. HE is the believer's new source of identity, not any of these other categories that become occasions for pride or despair.

b. This quote comes from Jeremiah 9, showing that the requirement to boast only in the Lord is not new but a consistent pattern throughout

i. **Jeremiah 9:23-24** Thus says the LORD, "Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; <sup>24</sup> but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the LORD who exercises lovingkindness, justice and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things," declares the LORD.

c. The command to boast only in the Lord reminds me of the five *solas* of the reformation:

i. We are saved

1. By Grace alone
2. Through Faith alone
3. In Christ alone
4. On the basis of Scripture alone
5. To the glory of God alone

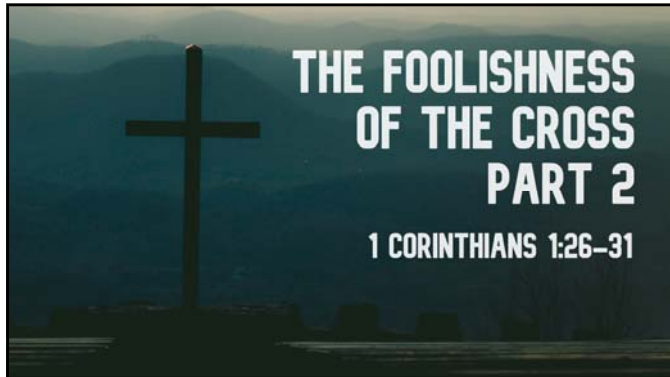
ii. This passage highlights all but the fourth sola (scripture).

1. It is by His doing that you are in Christ, your righteousness.

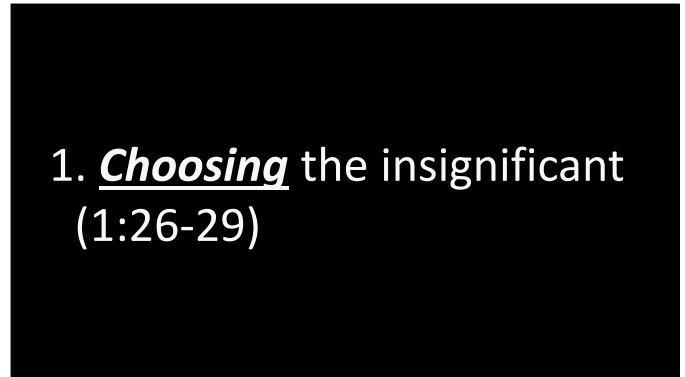
d. The problem in Corinth is divisions. The source of the division is pride – in self, in leaders (who then reflect on self).

i. CS Lewis: Pride is the mother hen under which all other sins hatch.

ii. The solution to pride is the cross.

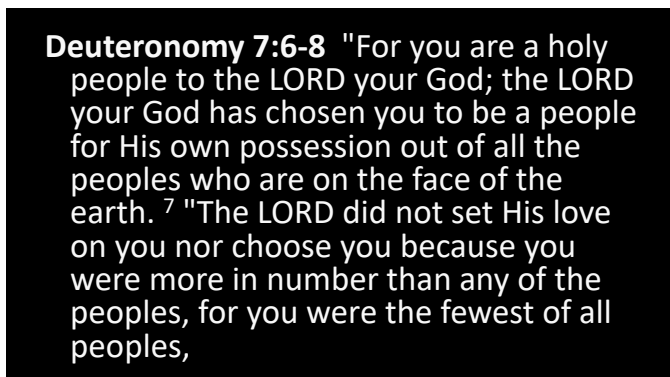


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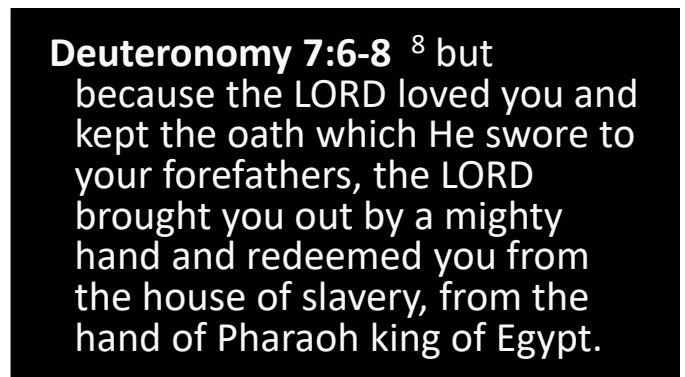
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1. Choosing the insignificant  
(1:26-29)



3

**Deuteronomy 7:6-8** "For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. <sup>7</sup> "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any of the peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples,



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**Deuteronomy 7:6-8** <sup>8</sup> but because the LORD loved you and kept the oath which He swore to your forefathers, the LORD brought you out by a mighty hand and redeemed you from the house of slavery, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.

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## 2. Saving in Christ (1:30)

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8



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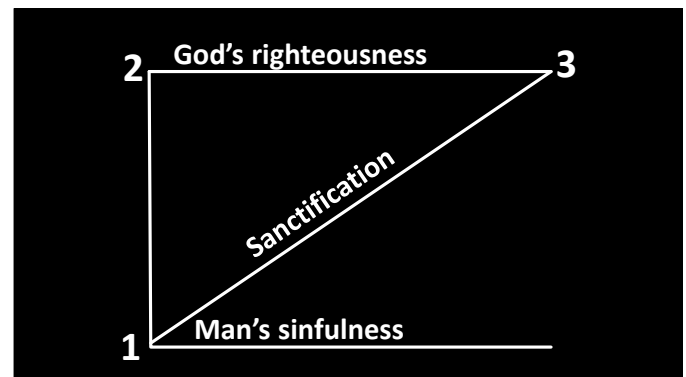
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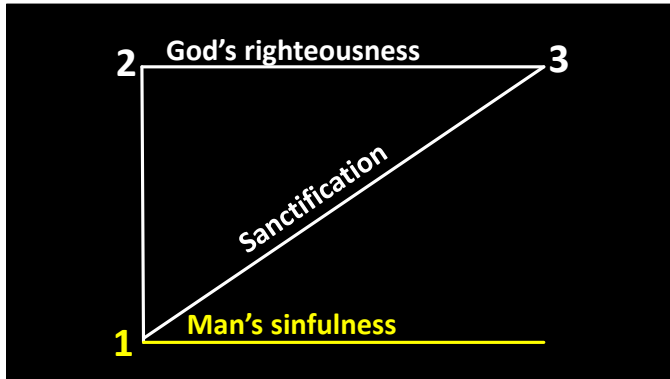
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**Philippians 3:9** and may be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own derived from the Law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which comes from God on the basis of faith,

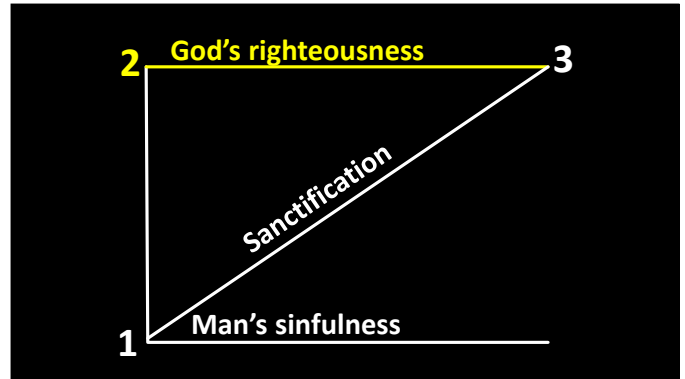
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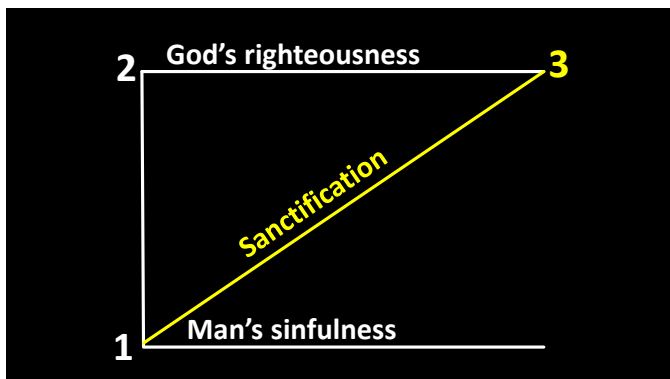
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17

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19