

GOD'S PEOPLE – BY NATURE AND BY GRACE

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Intro: One very interesting thing about this passage of Scripture, is that while in our Memory Work, we have it under Unconditional Election, it really could be under any one of the five Doctrines of Grace because they are all here. I do not say that we could fully identify each one from what we have in these verses, but, knowing what they are, we can see all of them here. Let me point them out for you.

The five doctrines are:

- 1) T – Total Depravity.
- 2) U – Unconditional Election.
- 3) L – Limited Atonement.
- 4) I – Irresistible Grace.
- 5) P – Perseverance of the Saints.

First, we see the evidence of Total Depravity at the end of verse 28, and then it runs on into verse 29: God has chosen “the thing which are not, to bring to nought the things that are, That no flesh should glory in His presence.”

Add to these the statements that we are foolish and weak, and you have further evidence of what we are by nature.

Secondly, three times we have the word “chosen”—twice in verse 27, and once in verse 28. This is Unconditional Election.

Third, Limited Atonement in verse 30, “But of Him are ye in Christ Jesus Who is made unto us...” Obviously this applies to the Lord’s people, and only to the Lord’s people. We could never say that for the unsaved God has placed them “in Christ,” and that “in Christ” unbelievers have Christ made to them “righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.”

Fourth, we have Irresistible Grace, or the Effectual Calling, in verse 26 as “your calling,” and “called.”

And then fifth and finally, we know that if God has made unto us “in Christ Jesus,” “righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption,” they are not ours only for a limited time, but for all eternity. And with these to our credit, we persevere in the faith: the Perseverance of the Saints. I have mentioned a time or two, or maybe more than that, that the fifth point

probably would be better called, the Perseverance of the Savior. He is the One Who keeps us through to the end. However, we display the evidence of salvation, and that is why this fifth point has been called, the Perseverance of the Saints.

So this is a very remarkable passage of Scripture, and I hope that those of you who have young children memorizing, will take the time to explain the verses we have so that they will understand why we have selected the verses we have, and will enter into an understanding of these great truths.

But why are these verses here at the beginning of Paul's first epistle to the Corinthians?

It is because of the divisions mentioned by Paul in verse 10, and explained in verses 11-15. Divisions of this kind soon become "contentions" (v. 11), and this makes the divisions wider and stronger. What had happened? The people were being divided over which of their leaders they preferred. (Read the verses.)

In chapter 3 the Apostle Paul got into the same subject again. (Read 3:1-7.)

They, although unintentionally as far as we know, had made Paul and Apollos and Peter competitors instead of fellow-workers in the Gospel. And this was having a disastrous effect upon the church. The very fact that Paul put this first, seems to indicate that he felt that this was the basic problem in the church, and that it had created most of the other problems that Paul was forced to deal with in this epistle.

This problem not only causes divisions within a church, but it also creates divisions between churches. Some say that they are a Baptists; others say that they are Presbyterians, and others say that we are a Bible church. And so we have the kind of a situation that exists in our country today—and in most other countries as well where the Gospel has gone.

It seems to me from the teaching we find in chapter 1, verses 26 to 31, that the Apostle was indicating that it is the teaching of the grace of God that will correct the problem once it exists, but, even better, it is the teaching of the grace of God that will keep these divisions from ever getting started. You see, the Doctrines of Grace, as they have been called, put us all on the same plane before God. God didn't save any of us because we deserve to be saved. It makes no difference where salvation is concerned how we

might distinguish between people socially, or educationally, or morally, or any other way, we all have to come to God through Christ as sinners under the judgment of God to find “righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption in Christ Jesus. There is no other salvation. There are not hundreds of ways to be saved. There are not even two ways to be saved. There is only one, and that is through Jesus Christ Who died on Calvary’s Cross to save sinners from their sins.

Now let us look at the text. First he reviewed for them what he indicated was:

I. “YOUR CALLING” (1 Cor. 1:26-28a).

He drew a series of contrasts. First, between the wise and the foolish. Second, between the mighty and the weak. Third, between the noble, those of high birth, and the ignoble, those of low birth, also called here “base” and “despised.”

And God has done a special thing in choosing those whom He has called. He has chosen to call the foolish in preference to the wise, the weak in preference to the strong, the base and despised in preference to the noble. And He had a distinct purpose in doing this. It was to make all people see, whether men or women of any age, or children of any age, that we are really nothing in ourselves, and have nothing to recommend us to God for salvation. We all must come to God in the same way, with no merits, but all demerits. It seems that the more we have to boast about because of our position in life, the harder it is for us to be saved. The publican and the Pharisee stand before God in the same way. Philemon was saved the same way that his slave, Onesimus, was saved. The thief on the Cross and Joseph of Arimathaea were saved the same way. And the fact that there seem to be more from the lower class than there are of the upper class, is designed to show all of us that God only saves sinners, and it is those who come to Christ as sinners who find salvation and life.

None of us has anything to do with the place we have in life by birth. Some are born high, some are born low, and some are born in between. But we all have the same need, and that is for salvation. We need to be saved because we are sinners, saved from the penalty of our sins, and saved from the power and dominion of our sins. And so whether a person is born high, or born low, or born in between the high and the low, sin is the problem.

Interestingly, you could find the same contrast between Paul and Apollos and Peter. It seems that Paul and Apollos had a more distinguished birth than did Peter. The one reason that some people would have been attracted to Peter was because he was the only one of the three who had been a disciple of our Lord while the Lord was here on earth. We don't know much about Apollos except for the fact that he was a Jew, born in Alexandria, but even he was instructed by Aquila and Priscilla who made their living by making tents. This probably would have been like a man with a Ph. D. being instructed by two who had never gone to a university. Wherever you look in the body of Christ, you see the contrast. I believe that I am right when I say that the majority of people in Spurgeon's great congregations in London, were poor people. He had the others, but most of them were poor.

God has His elect in all classes, and He has from the beginning been calling members of all classes of society to Himself. And they have all come through Christ. Masters and slaves were fellow-members of the churches throughout the Roman Empire. This did not mean that class distinctions no longer existed in the church, but it does mean that they all came to salvation in the same way: through Christ!

Now this leads us to ask, Why? Why was it this way?

II. THE PURPOSES OF GOD (1 Cor. 1:28b-31).

I see at least three purposes in the last three verses of this chapter, including the last part of verse 28.

A. "To bring to nought things that are; that no flesh should glory in His [God's] presence" (vv. 28b-29).

Nobility often has a hard time associating with the ignoble. And the ignoble, those of low birth, do not feel comfortable in the presence of nobility. Paul was not at all implying that low born people are humble. They often are very proud. But in order for any of us to be saved, whether high born, or low born, or in between, we have to come to the place where we see ourselves to be nothing, without any reason as all as to why God should save us, and with nothing at all to contribute to our salvation, because on then will any of us look to God to give us what He has for us in Christ. Ephesians 2:8-9 were written for the high, and the low, and everyone in between. And so was Acts 4:12, and Titus 3:5. And this is what our Lord said in John 14:6. By nature we are all sinners. Cf. Eph.

2:1-3. The Jew and the Gentile both must come in the same way, and that goes for everyone else regardless of distinctions which can be drawn between us.

And so none of us has any reason to glory in ourselves because we are saved.

A second reason:

B. Because all we have (and we all have all of salvation) we have because of what God has done for sinners in Christ (v. 30).

God is the One Who has taken the initiative in saving sinners. No sinner requested it. No one deserves it. God in His infinite wisdom has made Christ for those who are by sovereign grace in Him, “righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption.

1. “Righteousness.”

The high, the low, and all in between, have “righteousness” in Christ. Cf. 2 Cor. 5:21. We are justified before God. All charges against us have been met in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ. In Christ we are declared righteous before God. Cf. Rom. 3:24, “Being justified freely by His [God’s] grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

2. “Sanctification.”

This word describes our condition before God, but it also speaks of the continuing work of salvation in our lives. God is making us His holy people. We have been predestined from all eternity to be conformed to Christ. We are being made like Him. The death of Christ guaranteed this also.

3. “Redemption.”

The nobility among the people of God had to learn that they were slaves in a greater way than a slave in society. They, and all others, are slaves to sin. But the word “redemption” indicates that the freedom of those who were slaves to sin has been purchased by Christ, *and that there is no possibility that they can ever be drawn back into that slavery again.* And the price of our freedom was the blood of the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Apostle Peter stated it this way:

18 Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

19 But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

20 Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

21 Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God (1 Pet. 1: 18-21)

There is nothing more amazing that has ever taken place than what God did for His people when Christ died on the Cross.

But there is a third and last purpose that God has in planning salvation as He has. It is this:

C. That all of the glory should be given to Him (v. 31).

Here the Apostle Paul dipped into the OT to bring out a truth that is so easy for us to forget. The quotation is from Jer. 9:23-24:

23 Thus saith the LORD, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:

24 But let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.

You and I can never glory in that there is some reason in us as to why God saved us, nor can we glory that we have had any part in our salvation. All of the glory, both now and forever, belongs to God alone. And even to glory in those through whom the Gospel came to us, as the Corinthians were glorying in Paul and Apollos and Peter, is absolutely forbidden. It is God Who chose us, and it is He who calls us, and He alone redeems us though the sacrificial death of His Son. To God alone belongs all of the glory—Father, Son, and Spirit.

Concl: This is really a marvelous passage of Scripture, isn't it? Let us memorize it, and review it, and pray that the Lord will write it upon our hearts so that we will never forget it. And daily may we glorify

God that in His wonderful grace He has seen fit to save us from our sins.
This is our calling, and this is our salvation.