

THE WAY OF GOD IN SALVATION  
1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Intro: One fact is very apparent when we look at the world, regardless of the generation we might select, or the country that we might be considering. This fact is that sin has made man proud. And I am using man in the generic sense, meaning men, women, young people, boys and girls. It is apparent in children, and it continues on in adults. From the cradle to the grave the greatest human problem is pride. Pride keeps us from feeling any need for God. Pride keeps us from seeking help even when we know that we need it. Pride gives us that feeling of self-sufficiency. Pride is what caused Satan's downfall, and it is pride that has brought ruin and shame upon the human race. Pride is the main obstacle which stands in the way of man's salvation.

On the other hand, when the Psalmist said in Psalm 96:7, 8,  
Give unto the Lord, O ye kindreds of the people,  
give unto the Lord glory and strength.  
**Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name:**  
bring an offering, and come into his courts,  
he was indicating the great purpose behind man's creation and man's existence. We were made to glorify God.

In Isaiah 43:7 we read that the Lord said concerning all who are called by His Name, "I have created him for my glory." While the primary reference was to Israel, yet the same applies to all human beings. Paul put his finger on the worst effect of sin when he said, "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). Even the popular definition of sin tells the same story: Sin means missing the mark.

So, when we look at the human scene we see the two major sins which breed every other sin:

- 1) The pride of man.
- 2) Man's failure, and refusal, to glorify God.

I was speaking to a man recently whom I have known for many years. He has left his wife, and does not intend to go back to her. I told him that the main thing that he needed to be concerned about was what was pleasing to God. I said to him that if God is not pleased with what he is doing, he can't possibly find the happiness that he is looking for. But I learned just today that that did not mean anything to him. He is still intent on doing what he wants to do--regardless! You can tell people that some day they are going to have to stand before God to give an account of their lives, but that does not phase them at all. A man's life can be crumbling all around him, but he still refuses to hear about God.

In the light of man's twofold sin, his pride, and his failure to glorify God, Paul's presentation of the Gospel at the end of 1 Corinthians 1 is very interesting. Human pride was a problem in the Corinthian church even among those who knew the Lord. Their pride was demonstrated by their preferences for certain leaders in the church--Paul, Apollos, Cephas (Peter), and so on. It had divided the church, and it had caused other problems to develop.

Paul, in his attempt to solve their difficulty, brought them back to the basics of the Gospel. He talked about their calling from God. He talked about the choice that God had made of His people--which we should recognize as the doctrine of election. And then he showed a twofold purpose that God had in doing what he has done in salvation. Then he went on to show that none of us has anything in ourselves in which we can glory because all that we have which means anything at all to God is what we have in the Lord Jesus Christ. I want to consider these things with you tonight, and I hope that it will help us to see things more clearly in these days when our country is being torn apart to its ultimate destruction by human pride and by our refusal to recognize our responsibility to God.

First of all, let us notice what Paul said about:

I. OUR CALLING FROM GOD (Rom. 26).

Paul was speaking here about the effectual call. That is, that work of God by which He calls people to himself to save them, and they come. We issue a call to all men to come to Christ, but the Lord uses His Word to bring certain ones to Himself to save them.

There is not a one of us here tonight who is saved but what we owe our salvation to the personal call God has extended to us. He called us, and we came. He may have called us over a period of time, but eventually He won our hearts, and we came. We would never have come to Christ if we had been left to ourselves to come, and so with almighty love and constraint God moved upon us, and we came. We trusted in Christ because God called us to His Son.

But at this point Paul said, "Look at your calling." By that he meant, "Look around at your brothers and sisters in Christ, and tell me what you see."

Anybody who does this in any generation will see that there aren't many "wise men" according to the world's standards among us. There aren't many who are positions of power in the world among us. Nor are those of royal or noble descent.

You will remember that even our Lord was despised because He was not trained in the schools, nor was there anything to indicate that He had royal blood in His veins. He was a carpenter's son, people said, and they knew His family which was anything but high in the social scale.

People who fall into these three categories, and yet have been saved are quick to point out with thanksgiving that Paul did not say, "Not any," but "not many!" There are some college presidents and professors, some political leaders, some who come from royalty, but "not many." They are definitely in the minority. They might be looked up to in the world, but you don't find many of them in the church.

Why is this? And so I come to my second point:

## II. GOD'S CHOICE OF HIS PEOPLE (1 Cor. 1:27, 28a).

Paul said that you don't find many in that category who are in the church because God has not chosen many of them. And God calls those whom He has chosen. It is not just by chance that we know the Lord. In eternity past God chose us, and in our lifetime He called us, and so He has brought us to be His own because we are the very ones He chose. We can't understand why He would choose us, but we can be thankful that He did.

Now if you and I were making the choices, and we wanted to see people saved, wouldn't we go after the wise, the powerful, and the royalty? Wouldn't we feel that if lesser people could see the greater people following the Lord, that they would be more likely to come to the Lord themselves? Yes, that is the way we think. But that is not the way God thinks.

Who was it that the Lord chose to be His disciples? Most of them were fishermen. One was a hated publican. Another was a hated zealot. Who ever heard of these men before they came to the Savior? Nobody. Paul was one of the few exceptions, but he told the Philippian church that he counted all of those honors but dung in order to win Christ.

So who was chosen? Look around. The foolish. The weak. The base, meaning lowly, insignificant. The despised. Those who are nothing and would have nothing to commend them to anyone for special honors.

You don't find many wise among the Lord's people, but you find plenty who are foolish. You don't find many mighty people, but you find many who are weak. You don't find many from royal families, but you find many common people. There

is a preponderance of nobodies among the people of God.

God has the power to choose anyone He wanted to choose, and He has the power to call them to Himself so that they would come, but he did not see fit to work that way. Why?

This brings me to my third point:

III. GOD'S TWO REASONS FOR PLANNING SALVATION AS HE HAS  
(1 Cor. 1:27-29).

The first reason is stated at the end of verse 28:

A. "To bring to nought the things that are."

Paul used another word twice in verse 27 to express the same point. I am speaking of the word "confound."

You see, if God chose a lot of wise, mighty, noble people, man in his pride would be inclined to feel that he was chosen because he was either wise or mighty or noble--or all of them! But when you could just a few of them among the people of God, you know that they are there not because of what they are, but because of the grace of God. The common people are more inclined to know that they need grace; the others have to learn it.

The word "confound" means to make people blush with shame. In this case it would mean that they are brought to blush with shame for ever feeling that anything about them would commend them to God. When royalty is willing to sit along side of a commoner to sing the praises of God, you can be sure that the royalty has learned that his royalty did nothing to get him into the family of God. He had to come just like everyone else by realizing that he is totally bankrupt of anything that would commend him to God for salvation.

So when the few wise, mighty, and noble look around them, they see that we all have to come to Christ the same way--without a single plea except that Jesus Christ shed His blood to save us.

But what is the other reason? It is closely related to the first:

B. "That no flesh should glory in his presence."

The king sings with the pauper, "I'm only a sinner saved by grace."

Paul was not saying that there is anything wrong with being

educated, or with being the CEO of some great organization, or with being high in government, or being born into royalty or wealth. What he was saying that none of that amounts to anything with God to make anyone a more acceptable candidate for salvation. We all must come as hopeless, guilty, totally unworthy sinners. We may come from different levels of society, but there is only one door by which we can be saved. And this is what Paul went on to point out.

#### IV. WHAT MAKES US ACCEPTABLE TO GOD?

The answer is found in verse 30. Every word in this verse is extremely important.

"But of Him," that is, of God! God has taken the initiative in our salvation. He planned it. He chose us. He called us. And we have come--all at the same level: sinners in need of salvation.

Where are we now? "In Christ Jesus." Our acceptance with God is not in what we are, and certainly not in what we have done. It is in spite of all of that. Our acceptance is to be seen in our relationship with God's Son, Christ Jesus. And God has made Him our wisdom. It is through Christ that we have true wisdom, that we see things as they really are with God. And what is that wisdom? That in Christ Jesus we have "righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption."

Many expositors see in these three words the three major divisions of our salvation as they are presented by Paul in the book of Romans, "redemption," "our complete and final deliverance" (Godet, I, 120), our entrance into glory which will mean our glorification. Calvin says that these four words are titles of our Lord Jesus Christ, which "include His entire excellence, and every benefit that we receive from Him" (XX, 93).

All that we need to make us acceptable to God, and all that we need to sanctify and glorify us, we have in Christ Jesus. But we need to remember that it was purchased by Him at the most terrible price that could possibly be paid: His death on Calvary. It should not surprise us that Paul went on to say in 1 Cor. 2:2,

For I determined not to know any thing among you,  
save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

And so where does this bring us:

#### V. THE GLORY OF GOD (1 Cor. 1:31).

(Read verse 31.)

Paul said, "That, according as it is written." Where is it written? The marginal reference in your Bible should direct you to Jer. 9:23, 24:

Thus saith the Lord, Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, neither let the might man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches:  
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 see, Jeremiah was quoting the Lord who even in those days was talking about salvation.

Concl: Salvation corrects the two major sins of man--and along with it all other sins. Nobody can be saved unless they are humbled before God, and the only true salvation that there is directs all of the glory to God. Salvation is a divine work from start to finish. God chose us. Then He called us, and humbled us, and redeemed us, and has put that new song in our mouths of praise and glory to God.

James M. Gray, who was the President of Moody Bible Institute for many years, knew this truth of the sovereignty of God in salvation, and expressed it in that wonderful old hymn we have sung many times. Notice how he wove together the humbling of man, and the glory of God in the first verse and chorus:

Naught have I gotten but what I received;  
Grace hath bestowed it since I have believed;  
**Boasting excluded, pride I abase;**  
I'm only a sinner saved by grace.

Only a sinner saved by grace!  
Only a sinner saved by grace!  
This is my story, **to God be the glory,**  
I'm only a sinner saved by grace!

This is the song of the redeemed whether they be wise, or mighty, or noble; whether they be foolish, or weak, or base, or despised--all stand on the same ground of nothingness in salvation, humbled at heart, glorifying God, Who alone is worthy of our praise.

It is at the Cross where human sins are forgiven, and God begins that work for the glorification of His people. Make sure that you have come to God through Christ.