

Oct 18 A Healthy Relationship in Christ (**Identity**)

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

*Brothers, 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. 27 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. 28 He chose the **lowly** things of this world and the **despised** things — and the things that **are not** — to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are **in Christ Jesus**, who has become for us wisdom from God — that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."*

I. **Being Called**

Paul had 2 things happened:

1.) He was **converted**

2.) He was **called**. Specifically, he was called to be a minister to the Gentiles.

But this isn't about PAUL; this is about "YOU." *You were **called***. He's writing this to the believers in Christ at Corinth. Maybe a few of them are preachers or teachers, but he is talking about ALL of them. Just as we are converted in different ways, so we will be called in different ways. Disciples are said to be "*the called of Jesus*," "*called out of darkness into marvelous light*," "*called unto liberty*," "*called to peace*," "*called to eternal life*," "*called first, to be afterwards justified and glorified*," "*called to inherit a blessing*," "*called in one body*" and "*one hope*," "*called by God's grace*" to "*holiness*," to "*His kingdom and glory*," with "*a holy calling*," "*a heavenly calling*." The apostles are "called" from one place, work, suffering, joy, to another. Notice the prominence of this teaching.

We often resist because we don't feel smart or capable enough. Moses was told to "Go to Pharaoh" to bring the Israelites out of Egypt. Moses protests his call, "Who am I that I should go?" (Identity Excuse...God said He would be with Moses). "I don't know your Name" (Theology Excuse... "I am" is God's Name), "They won't believe me" (Results Excuse... Moses was given a rod), and finally "I can't speak eloquently" (Talent Excuse... Aaron was called alongside to help). Moses ends up pleading: "Please send someone else to do it"

Have you felt called? How have you responded to your calling? Like Moses, we often feel inadequate to do what we believe God is calling them to do (like Moses), but it's also true that a lot of times, like Moses, we just prefer staying in our comfort zone.

At the center of this is a war which wages within our hearts. "Can I really trust God?" People live with a lot of fear as to what God might call us to do. I'm not equipped to do that. I'm uncomfortable doing that. When we capitulate to our fears we end up feeling guilty.

What do you think **Paul** thought when he first got "zapped?" He went from murdering Christians to ministering Christ. He had enormous guilt over what he had done for the rest of his life. He called himself "the chief of sinners." He didn't feel that was hyperbole.

II. Identity

A.) *“Not many of you were wise by human standards....”*

Paul wrote “not **many**.” He didn’t say “not **any**.” We do meet some believers with high social standing in the New Testament. But there are not many of them. The description Paul gave of the converts was certainly not a flattering one (6:9-11). Paul reminded them of **what** they were (v. 26). They were not wise, mighty, or noble. God called them, not because of what they were, but in spite of what they were! The Corinthian church was composed primarily of ordinary people who were sinners. Before his conversion, Paul had been very self-righteous; he had to give up his religion in order to go to heaven! The Corinthians were at the other end of the spectrum, and yet they were not too sinful for God to reach and save them.

B.) *But God chose the **foolish** (and **weak**) things...*

The larger context here is about how God works. There is a major contrast between the foolishness of the world vs. the wisdom of God. What’s wise in God’s eyes is often what is ignorant within the culture of the secular world.

God called **Moses**. He should have picked someone else. Moses was a felon and a fugitive. This was outrageous. Why didn’t God call someone else?

Samuel the priest asked Jesse to bring his sons in front of him as he was going to select one of them to go fight the giant Goliath. All 7 of Jesse’s sons appeared but each time they were rejected. Samuel said, “Jesse, do you have any **other** sons?” Jesse said, “Well, yeah, the runt of the litter is out tending sheep.” **David’s** selection to fight Goliath was so counter-intuitive.

Paul – murdering Christians? And he was chosen to go to the Gentiles?

Jesus – Look @ the Incarnation! Jesus came in lowliness, weakness, born to a virgin in a manger in Bethlehem of Judea? It’s not the way we would do it.

But this is the way God works. God seems to love to show off by working in the lives of the most unlikely of people. These are often people who have a history and a record, or are too young or too old or “too something.” Like Moses, we have a lot of excuses. But, the wisdom of God is greater than the foolishness of men.

God's grace leaves no room for personal boasting. God is not impressed with our looks, social position, achievements, natural heritage, or our financial status.

Paul reminded the Corinthians of **why** God called them (vv. 27-29). God chose the foolish, the weak, and the despised to show the proud world their need and His grace. The lost world admires birth, social status, financial success, power, and recognition. But none of these things can guarantee eternal life. The entire way Jesus came to earth is shocking – virtually unbelievable that God would act in such a manner. The message and miracle of God's grace Jesus Christ utterly confounds the high & mighty of this world.

The wise of this world cannot understand how God changes sinners into saints, and the mighty of this world are helpless to duplicate the miracle. God's "foolishness" confounds the wise; God's "weakness" confounds the mighty!

2 Cor 12:7-10 To keep me from becoming conceited because of these surpassingly great revelations, there was given me a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. 8 Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me. 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. 10 That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

Church history is filled with the stories of lives transformed by the power of the Gospel. Amazing things take place that the lawyers and psychologists could not understand. People with substance issues & addictions have broken free. Delinquent teenagers become successful students and useful citizens. Marriages restored and homes reclaimed much to the amazement of the courts.

In this chapter, we see that the Corinthians' made mistakes that helped create problems in their church. They were not living up to their holy calling, but were instead following the standards of the world. They ignored the fact that they were called into a wonderful spiritual fellowship with the Lord and with each other. Instead, they were identifying with human leaders and creating divisions in the church. Instead of glorifying God and His grace, they were pleasing themselves and boasting about men. They were a defiled church, a divided church, a disgraced church!

Before we pass judgment on them, we should examine our own churches and our own lives. We have been called to be holy, called into fellowship, and called to glorify God. Are we living up to this calling?

*C.) you are **in Christ Jesus***

Here's our choice....base our identity upon our accomplishments, financial portfolios, social standings, etc. OR we base our identity upon Jesus Christ. The former is all about power, position, and pride... the latter is totally dependent upon a new identity. Those who have the "most" in worldly goods seem to have the most to lose. That's why Jesus said it's so hard for a rich person to go to heaven – they trust in their money, not in God. Their "stuff" becomes their god. They don't want to give it up. So, if you're poor, you feel like by trusting in God you don't lose a whole lot. In fact, the gain is quite noticeable.

I like the image of being "in" an airplane as analogous to being "in Christ." If you wanted to get to Hawaii, you'd want to fly. You get on a plane and it takes you there. Without the flight, you'd have to go by boat (lengthy). You can't get there by train, truck, or car. But being "in" the airplane takes you to a destination you'd never be able to go

otherwise. That's what being "in Christ" is like – He takes us to places we could never go on our own!

Identity theft is a major problem. People who have this happen can spend thousands of dollars and hundreds of hours trying to get things reconciled. It is an absolute nightmare. I think of the original identity theft – it came in the Garden of Eden with Adam & Eve. They lost their original standing with God and replaced it with new things: judgment, criticism, blame, defensiveness, projection. And the result of that was a very dysfunctional family.

"If someone stole you identity, besides your money what would they have? Besides your money do you have an identity worth stealing?"

What you work for your whole life can be taken away on a laptop if you just know the right numbers.

I was watching the Yankees play last night and realized that they don't have the names of the players on the back of their jerseys. I thought, "That's odd! They must be the only team in all of Major League baseball who don't have their names on their jerseys. Why?" If you think about it, the Yankees have the greatest history in sports franchises. If you play for the Yankees you play for the team that Babe Ruth, Lou Gehrig, Joe DiMaggio, Yogi Berra, Whitey Ford, Mickey Mantle, and Roger Maris played for. In other words, if you play Yankees, you don't need to have your name on your jersey. The team and their tradition transcend any individual. All you need is the NYY insignia.

Likewise, if we are "in Christ" we don't really need our names on our jersey. Our relationship with Christ is all we need. That is far greater than anything we could ever accomplish on our own. Just to be able to wear that jersey is an incredible gift – and it's something we don't earn or deserve – God richly gives it to us by virtue of His grace. Too many of us really feel insignificant. As a result of that inferiority we feel we've got to do things to make ourselves important. What's the name on the back of your jersey? Is it "Money," "Entertainment," "Sex," "Career," or "Pride?" The way of Jesus is very counter-intuitive. It's God's wisdom, not man's. That's why the teaching of the New Testament is about "Generosity," "Kindness," "Service," or "Worship."

Does my life consist of the abundance of my possessions? Am I merely earthbound? OR am I a person of sacred worth, who has an eternal destination of glory? Do I have something to live for and die for here on earth? Am I being a "short-term" thinker or a "long-term" thinker? Am I being the foolish person or the wise person in building my life on the sand or on the rock?

The old question was: "*If you were arrested for being a Christian would there be enough evidence to convict you?*" I think 2 things are primary in evidence here:

- 1.) How do you spend your time?
- 2.) How do you spend your money?

These tell the tale of where your heart is. It's a heart issue.

Who am I?

*A **Family** member: (son, brother, husband, father, uncle, great-uncle, in-law)

*A **Friend** (my friendships usually revolve around hobbies: sports, traveling, & reading.)

***Called** into Ministry: (a pastor, a United Methodist in Oklahoma; an ATS alumni)

***Converted** (A Sinner; a child of God; forgiven. You are bought with a price – you are not your own.)

The first 3 things will eventually fade & disappear. But my conversion leads to a glorious new life.

Who are YOU? What is your identity? Are you “In Christ” or are you “In Yourself?”