



Epiphany

2/1/2026

1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Chosen

When I was in grade school, we spent a lot of recesses playing games like dodgeball or basketball or kickball. For a lot of those games, one of the most important parts started even before we started playing. Two kids would be chosen to be team captains – usually two of the most athletic ones to even things out – and then those two would choose the rest of the people they wanted to be on their team. For dodgeball, the strongest people were usually chosen first. For basketball the tallest. For kickball the fastest. But no matter which game we ended up playing, the people were usually chosen based on what kind of skills they could bring to the table. Based on what they could do.

Today, we are going to talk about who God chooses. Not to be a part of his team, but a part of his family. And we'll see that the reasons for his choice might not be what

Before we dive into the Apostle Paul's words about God choosing people, we need to know why he was writing this letter in the first place. The city of Corinth was a bustling city in Greece. It was the hub for a lot of trade routes, meaning it attracted lots of people from across the Roman Empire. But it was also one of the most money obsessed, success obsessed, and sex obsessed cities in the ancient world. Even by ancient Greek standards, it was a place of terrible immorality.

These problems had an impact on the culture of the Corinthian congregation as well. They were a church that had a lot of problems. Take a look at Paul's letter and you'll see that they had disorderly worship services, that there was a case of church discipline that hadn't been dealt with, and that there were even divisions inside of the congregation.

Paul deals with one of these divisions in the very first chunk of his letter. The Corinthians were arguing with each other about which of the Apostles or their previous pastors would have been best to follow. Paul is pretty quick to point out the ridiculousness of this idea. [READ]

Why would an argument like this start up in the first place? They were basically saying, "Paul is the most insightful, and that means I'm smarter than you." Or "Cephas is the most charismatic, and that means I'm better at sharing my faith than you." It was all selfish posturing. It was never an argument about which of those men was the best teacher. Instead, it was a way for the Corinthians to try to argue about which one of them was the best Christian. They were taking pride in themselves instead of putting the gospel at the center. They were placing value in the wrong things.

I think we can all agree this isn't just an ancient problem, but something that people still struggle with today. But that brings us to an important question: What does it really mean to place value in the wrong things?

Sometimes it's as simple as placing too much value in the things of this world. You might be focused on success to the point that you are stealing time away from your family. You might value leisure and relaxation to the point that you neglect some of your duties, or even neglect Bible reading or worship. Whether it's money, or pleasure, or success, it's possible to take anything in this world and put so much value into it that it becomes a false god in your heart.

But if you only examine your external priorities, you might miss a deeper problem. Frankly, you don't have to be a Christian to recognize that it's wrong to put too much value in earthly things. Plenty of other religions believe that. Read any self help book and you'll probably find that message too. Changing bad priorities, apologizing for hurting people, looking for ways to improve – everybody does that. Every religion and cult and philosophy will tell you to turn away from (at least it's own version of) bad behavior.

But here's the difference with Christianity. The Bible doesn't just tell you to turn away or repent of bad behavior. It tells you to repent of your righteousness. If you don't believe me, just take a look at this passage [READ filthy rags verse]. Even our brightest moments, the things that look the best to God and everyone else, are filthy rags. Why is that?

It's because when we do something outwardly good, we often use it as an excuse to take pride in ourselves. You get into an argument with an unbeliever, and you're upset not because they're rejecting Christ but because they disagree with you. You help out with ten extra things at church, not because you want to serve the Lord selflessly, but because you like the praise and attention it gives you from other people.

It's not that defending the faith is wrong or serving in the church is wrong, of course. But it becomes wrong when we do it for ourselves and not for God. It's wrong when we place our value in how good we feel, on our "accomplishments" in the church, on our own righteousness instead of righteousness from God.

Placing value in the wrong things is always dangerous. Sometimes it's easy to spot – like with worldly pleasures. Sometimes it's harder to detect, like when we take pride in our good works apart from God. But either way, we end up falling into the devil's trap. Maybe you could think of it this way. Satan sneaks into the Walmart off of Lemmon at 2 am. While he's in there, he goes around the store switching price tags around. The bologna gets a \$30 price tag. The t bone steak is \$2.99. The Oreos are a buck twenty. The off brand drydox are \$10. The next morning, people head into the store and

there's chaos. Bologna is flying off the shelves. People are fighting over off brand food in all the aisles. The devil's trick worked! He got people to despise and ignore the valuable, delicious food, and fight over the off brand stuff instead!

As goofy as that example sounds, that's basically what the Corinthian Christians were doing to each other. They were boasting about their own understanding, about which pastor they followed, about their own righteousness – and the Apostle Paul knew that was a warning sign that they were beginning to value their own works more than God.

And if you're valuing your own talents or intellect more than the righteousness God gives you, you're acting like off-brand bologna is better than a piece of steak. That attitude is just as ridiculous today!

So what was the solution for the Corinthians? What's the solution for us? How do we make sure that we aren't valuing the things of this world and our own works more than what God gives to us?

Paul's answer is simple: remember why you are a Christian in the first place.

Is it because you had more power and influence than anybody else? Is it because you were smarter? Wiser? More successful? More deserving? No. [READ]

"But God chose the weak things..."

You didn't have anything to offer God. You weren't worthy. You weren't lovable. Nothing good was in you! But God doesn't choose you because you have something to offer, because you bring something special and unique to the table. That would mean God's love is conditional. No, the Lord had no reason to choose you at all. But he chose you anyway.

And Paul doesn't stop there. [v. 30] You don't need to boast, or hang onto the idea that you are righteous on your own, or wise on your own, or anything on your own. Because the determining factor in your relationship with God is not your record but Christ's record. It's not your past that's filled with sins and mistakes and selfishness anyway. It's Jesus' past. It's not your life that counts, but his life. Not your name, but his name that he has written on your heart. He is your wisdom, your righteousness, your holiness, your redemption.

God chooses people who have nothing and gives them everything. He has given everything to you.

God's gracious, incredible choice is the reason there is no room for boasting in our lives. Because we know we are weak and sinful, we don't bother pointing people to ourselves. Instead we point them to Christ.

The fact you are chosen by God is also the reason Christians are unified. In the city of Corinth, it's no wonder there were so many quarrels. There were people of different cultures, from all corners of the Roman Empire, with different ideas and opinions. But all of them were equally sinful, equally undeserving of God's love. And no matter who they were or where they came from, God had given them faith in the same Savior.

By being reminded of that fact, the Christians in Corinth didn't have to waste any more time playing the comparison game with each other. Instead, they could see that their differences gave them opportunities. Every one of them could use their individual gifts to serve God, could use their language skills or cultural background to share the gospel with people they couldn't have reached otherwise. They could actually use their differences to glorify God instead of glorifying themselves.

Our church today is just as diverse. We're from different cultures and different generations. Some of us grew up in the church, some of us just became Christians. We have different backgrounds and opinions. And yet all of us have been chosen by God. That means our differences are not things that divide us as Christians. They give us unique opportunities to serve, to share the gospel in our community. You have a unique social circle that you can share the gospel with. You have strengths that others don't have, and you can use them to serve others. Other Christians here are strong in areas that you are weak, meaning that God has blessed you with people to lean on and rely on as we work together to get his Word out into the world.

And not only do we have unity with each other. We have freedom in Christ. Freedom because we know we are valued by God. That means we have freedom to try things and fail, as a congregation, as individual Christians. Freedom to show love to others. Freedom to see unbelievers not as people too weak or foolish to change their ways. But as souls that Jesus loves. Because it doesn't matter if you end up looking ridiculous. You have been set free from pride and selfish posturing. That means it doesn't matter if your idea didn't work. It doesn't matter that you lost respect, or health, or anything else in the end.

All that matters is Christ.

Through faith you already have Him. And He already has you.

Amen.