

"The Kind of Wisdom that Matters" 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Introduction

- What's the most foolish thing you've ever heard someone do? My uncle once ran his car through the carwash with the windows down in order to wash the upholstery. Not a wise move. We have a family friend who many years ago spurned the affections of a guy by the name of Steve Jobs. He owns this small company by the name of Apple. Ever heard of it? Not a wise move. Actually the guy she married instead is a great guy.
- [James Dobson](#) in his book *Bringing Up Boys* tells the story of Dave and his friend and their foolish decision as kids. In Dave's own words, "A friend and I found a coffee can of gasoline in the garage and we decided to pour some down a manhole, light it, and see what would happen. We popped the manhole open, poured some gas in, and replaced the cover so that it was ajar. We kept throwing matches down but nothing happened, so we poured all the gas in. Finally, there was a noise like a jet engine starting up, and then a big BOOM! The manhole cover flew up and a flame shot up about fifteen feet in the air. The ground was rumbling like an earthquake, and the manhole cover crashed about twelve feet away in the neighbor's driveway. What happened was the gas ran down the sewer lines for a block or so and vaporized with all the methane in there, and blew up all our neighbors' toilets. I'm a plumber now; that's how I know exactly what happened."¹ Not a wise move.
- Yesterday, March 24th, marked the 18 year anniversary of one really foolish decision. March 24, 1989 a guy by the name of [Captain Joe Hazelwood](#) retired to his quarters leaving his 987-foot supertanker in the hands of an unqualified helmsman. 11 million of gallons of crude oil later the Exxon Valdez oil spill became the worst oil spill in our nation's history and one of the worst environmental disasters ever.
- Clearly, some choices are worse than others. I tell you what. When I read the words of 1 Corinthians 1:26 it sounds like God has made a mistake. Listen. [Verse 26](#). *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.* Where's the wisdom in that? The passage we are going to look at this morning talks about the kind of people in the Corinthian church that had become followers of Christ. Like the team captain who intentionally chooses the scrubs to play on her team God deliberately chose nobodies for his team. Not a wise move. Or is it? What's going in this passage? What's this passage talking about?
- This passage is about the wisdom of God. In spite of appearances, God makes no foolish choices. God's wisdom means that God always chooses the best goals and the best means to those goals.² God's ultimate goal is salvation through Christ. And the best means to that goal, as foolish as it sounds, is the preaching of the cross—which we talked about last week.

Transition

This week we are going to shift to another aspect of God's wisdom in salvation specifically as it relates to God's election or his choice of who he saves. What I think this passage teaches very clearly is that...

¹ James Dobson, *Bringing Up Boys*, p. 3

² Grudem, p. 193.

Proposition

- **One of wisest things God does is freely and sovereignly choose to save who he wants to save**
- Throughout scripture God routinely saves nobodies as he did in the Corinthian church. As one author puts it, "Abraham was old, Jacob was insecure, Leah was unattractive, Joseph was abused, Moses stuttered, Gideon was poor, Samson was codependent, Rahab was immoral, David had an affair and all kinds of family problems, Elijah was suicidal, Jeremiah was depressed, Jonah was reluctant, Naomi was a widow, John the Baptist was eccentric to say the least, Peter was impulsive and hot-tempered, Martha worried a lot, the Samaritan woman had several failed marriages, Zacchaeus was unpopular, Thomas had doubts, Paul had poor health, and Timothy was timid."³ And somehow those choices are a demonstration of God's wisdom. How? That's the question we're going to try to answer this morning.

Transition

This morning, I want you see from this passage...

Organizational Sentence

- **Two goals in God's election that demonstrate his wisdom**

Transition

But before we look at God's two goals in election I need you to be convinced that this passage is about God's election and we need to define what election is.

Background

- I want you to notice that the word *choice* occurs three times in this section. Look at verse 27. *But God chose.* Verse 27 again. *God chose.* Verse 28. *He chose.* That word *choice*, same word each time, refers to "the act of choosing which includes a judgment by the chooser as to which object he considers to be the most suitable for the fulfillment of his purpose. And that choice is not necessarily based upon objective criteria or even subjective feelings."⁴ What is God's election? "Election is an act of God before creation in which he chooses some people to be saved, not on account of any foreseen merit in them, but only because of his sovereign good pleasure."⁵ In other words, your salvation and mine is completely and totally an act of God. If you were to try to pin down the principles that underlie God's choice you'd be hard pressed. God's choice is not based upon anything other than his free decision to favor and love who he wants to favor and love. As 2 Timothy 1:8-9 says, *[God] saved us and called us to a holy life--not because of anything we have done but because of his own purpose and grace. This grace was given us in Christ Jesus before the beginning of time.*
- Now, the objections to God's election mostly relate to what God's choice does to us as free creatures. Some say election means we have no choice or our choices can't possibly be real. Personally, I believe that God's choice and man's freedom somehow work together. [A.W. Tozer](#) gives a helpful illustration of how the two might cooperate. He writes, "An ocean liner leaves New York bound for Liverpool. Its destination has been determined by proper

³ Rick Warren, *The Purpose Driven Life*, p. 233.

⁴ NIDNT, vol. 1, p. 536.

⁵ Grudem, p. 670.

authorities. Nothing can change it. This is at least a faint picture of sovereignty. On board the liner are scores of passengers. These are not in chains, neither are their activities determined for them by decree. They are completely free to move about as they will. They eat, sleep, play, lounge about on the deck, read, talk, altogether as they please; but all the while the great liner is carrying them steadily onward toward a predetermined port. Both freedom and sovereignty are present here, and they do not contradict. So it is, I believe, with man's freedom and the sovereignty of God."⁶

- Some also object to election on the grounds that unbelievers never had a chance to believe. But the bible doesn't teach that. The bible teaches that we are all responsible for either choosing or rejecting the gospel. Some say election is unfair. But it must be remembered that God would be perfectly just to not save anyone. Again, what I think his passage is teaching is that **God's wisdom is demonstrated in his free and sovereign choice to save who he wants to save.** And the question is how? How can there be wisdom in God acting this way? What is to be gained by it?

Transition

Look at verses 26-29 and the first goal of election. There's wisdom in this. The **first goal** of election is that **God chooses so that mankind can't boast before Him.** Listen. *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.*

Main Points

- What God is really against is boasting. God chooses in order to nullify boasting. The Corinthian church boasted of their wisdom. They thought they were spiritual. Chapter 3 verse 1. They elevated preachers with a worldly kind of wisdom that was eloquent and intelligent and erudite and sophisticated. And Paul says God just doesn't value what you value. Instead, God elevates the foolish preaching of the cross. And through the foolish message of the cross God chooses to save some nobodies. Not the intelligentsia. Not the powerful. Not the movers and shakers. But you not-so-special Corinthians. Why? So that no one might boast before Him. One man put it like this. "The goal of God in election is the elimination of all human pride, all self-reliance, all boasting in man."⁷ Another, this way. "God deliberately chose the foolish things of the world, the cross and the Corinthian believers, so that he could remove forever, from every human creature, any possible grounds on their part of standing in the divine presence with something in their hands."⁸ What's the first goal of election? **God chooses so that mankind can't boast before Him.**
- Let me ask you, why is favoritism wrong? By the way, favoritism never happens in churches, does it? The Corinthian church had a problem with favoritism. I think it's why Paul reminds them of God's election. Favoritism is wrong because it assumes a kind of wisdom that decides one person should be treated better than another because of what they

⁶ AW Tozer, *Knowledge of the Holy*, p.

⁷ John Piper, *The Pleasures of God*, p. 137.

⁸ Fee, p. 84.

have to offer. But did God do that with us? Did he choose us because of what we had to offer him? No. So as a church we've got to guard against feelings of jealousy towards others more gifted than ourselves. From God's perspective, they're really nobodies just like we are. Before the cross the playing field is leveled. But more importantly, please hear me. We must never show partiality in friendship to those who may have something to offer us while neglecting those who seemingly have nothing to offer us. If you play favorites in here you damage the body of Christ and discredit the name of God. Do Christians with godly wisdom or special gifts or lots of money or important jobs merit any special status in the body of Christ? Absolutely not—because of God's election. That's the wisdom of God.

- I want you to think for a second about God's election in a more personal way. If you are in Christ it is because God chose you. Just bask in the glory of what that means for a second. He chose you. Your infinite worth as an individual doesn't come from anything you can say or do to please God, your worth comes because you're His. Skip ahead and look at verse 30. *It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus.* You're chosen. And if you know what it is to drink from the spring of living water that is Christ, if you know what it means to have your soul satisfied by Christ the bread of life, if you are one of Christ's sheep who hear and follow his voice know beyond a shadow of a doubt that you are his because he made you his. God has wisely wisdom so the glory might be His and His alone.
- And if you are not yet a Christian maybe it's because you keep coming to God with something in your hands. God wants you, more than anything, but he wants you on His terms. He doesn't want what you bring. He wants you empty, broken, disarmed of your pride, and stripped of your self-reliance—unable to boast that you were able to give him anything. If you are banking on anything to curry favor with God you won't find Him. But if you come to Him empty by the way of the cross and you come wanting to be filled with love and forgiveness and grace and mercy you will find a God with open arms and an open heart.

Transition

Look now at verses 30 and 31. What's the **second goal** of election? It's the opposite of the first. The first goal? **God chooses so that mankind can't boast before Him.** The second goal? **God chooses so that his people might boast in Him alone.** Listen. *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."*

- On January 1st of this year Texas Tech basketball coach Bob Knight won his 880th game—the most by any coach in men's Division I college basketball history. In my opinion, Knight is the epitome of boastful arrogance. In a press conference after the game, this is what he actually said: "I did it my way—and when I look back on it, I don't think my way was all that bad."⁹
- One of the things that God's election does is free us up to be Knight-like in our boasting. "God did it his way." Can't you see God's wisdom in this? God's not against all kinds of boasting just the kind that doesn't give credit where credit is due. He wants credit for our salvation. He deserves credit for our salvation. God wants us to boast. *Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.* Our salvation doesn't depend on anything but God. So let's boast of him.

⁹ Jamie Aaron, "Knight Gets Win No. 880, Passing Smith," Yahoo! News (1-1-07)

Through Christ God has given us righteousness and holiness and redemption as it says in verse 30. We reap the fruit of something we did not work for. Christ earned those things for us.