

# 1 CORINTHIANS 1:26–31

Third Sunday after Pentecost, June 30, 2019

Smith

## GOD HAS CHOSEN YOU

**26 Brothers and sisters, 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 God 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 the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”**

What’s the difference between being invited somewhere and just turning up? If it’s a friend’s house, you might be welcome, but what if it’s not? What if it’s a complete stranger’s house? Or what would sergeant in the army do if a soldier from a completely different army suddenly turned up in the barracks? Or what would the owner of bank do if someone just walked into the vault, telling everyone that he “just wanted to help”?

Being invited guarantees that you’re wanted, desired and welcome. The Bible talks about Christians being “called” by God. Now, there are two kinds of calls. One is the call to the public ministry; this is the kind of call that I have, or Pastor Scharf or Pastor Sutton, or Mr. Markgraf or any of our Staff Ministers or our teachers at St. Paul’s School, or MVL, or MLC. But the Bible also talks about a broader call, and that’s the call to faith through the Gospel. This is the call that Paul is talking about here. He is explaining how valuable and precious this call is, the call of being a Christian, of having faith in Jesus. It is the call into God’s family, the call that tells each and every one of us here that we are **wanted by God, desired by God, and welcome from God**. Your call from God means that **God has chosen you**.

We call this act of choosing and all of the teaching the Bible does about it the Doctrine of Election. And although different Christians have understood this in different ways over the centuries, we want to confine ourselves just to what the Bible says about it. As I have studied this doctrine and meditated on it over the years, and taught it in catechism class, I have found most of our questions end up running back to one fact in particular, and that is when God chose us.

To answer this, we turn to Ephesians, where Paul tells us: “He chose us before the beginning of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight.” (Eph. 1:4) And Paul told the Thessalonians: “From the beginning God chose you to be saved through the sanctifying work of the Spirit and through belief in the truth.” (2 Th 2:13) So in our lifetime, we don’t talk about Election or the fact that God

chose us with a “when” or a “how.” It was done before we born, before the world was even made. God had foreknowledge of you and chose you for one reason: Grace.

I must never be caught in the trap of imagining that God saw something in me, or that he chose me in view of some quality in me like my personality, or the way I’m such a snappy dresser, or because of the way I can carry the tenor line, or even... or even, my faith. No. God didn’t choose me for any of these reasons. This is why we confess in the explanation to the Third Article:

**I believe that I cannot by my own thinking or choosing believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to him. But the Holy Spirit has called me by the gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith.**

God’s election, his choosing us before the act of Creation, also shows us that our faith and our righteousness is not the reason for our calling. No: It is God’s Sovereign choice that is the cause for our faith and our salvation. It is as if God has always had a bulletin board by his throne. And your name was pinned up there right from the beginning, so that history has taken place for your sake. You and your faith are not incidental, you are not an accident of history, as if you might or might not have come to faith depending on whether the Gospel happened to show up in your town. No—history has taken place under your name and your place in God’s kingdom, specifically to bring you into God’s family. And this is what we confess in the explanation to the First Article:

**God also preserves me by defending me against all danger, guarding and protecting me from all evil. All this God does only because he is my good and merciful Father in heaven, and not because I have earned or deserved it.**

Now, since there was no universal election of all people or even of any one group of people, God’s grace and comfort are revealed even more when we realize that we were chosen, each of us, personally, in eternity. This election then in particular, you were also personally called through holy Baptism. And this comes to us where we live here in time, through the means of grace, the Gospel in the Word of the Bible and in our Baptism.

And here is where Paul wants us to see God’s grace even more sharply by pointing out who we are. And so Paul brings out a list of comparisons: What the world likes as opposed to what God chose.

**God chose the foolish, not the wise.** How often aren’t Christians ridiculed because of our foolish, simple faith, that trusts God rather than philosophy or science or popular opinion. Our faith that the Bible is completely true and without any errors is a good example of what seems like foolishness to the world but stands as a pillar of our faith.

**God chose the weak**, not the strong. What was Abraham when God called him? An old man already, beyond the age to start a family. And yet God made him wait until he was 100 and Sarah was 90 when Sarah finally became a mother. And what about the servant girl who shared her faith with Naaman, the Syrian commanding general with leprosy.

**God chose the lowly** – like David, not the tallest, not the oldest, not the most respected, but the one who would be God’s instrument. And the lowly like the disciples, who had in their number simple fishermen, a despised tax collector, a rebellious Zealot, and others, but all followed Jesus.

**God chose the despised** – like Moses the runaway murderer. Like Joseph, hated even by his own brothers and sold in the slavery, all but forgotten, yet used by God to bring about the salvation of his family and all of Egypt.

**And God chose “the things that are not.”** What kinds of things could Paul mean? Well, think of the dead stump of Jesse, a kingly line no longer producing kings, and yet the King of the Jews was born from this dead thing, this thing that no longer seemed to exist.

And despite our sins, to rescue us from our sins, and for no other reason than to rescue us and to rescue those who will be touched with the gospel through us, he saved us.

What sins are on your account today? What shame do you carry before God?

- Is there a sinful desire lurking in your heart? Has gossip been on your lips lately, or lies?
- Have you stolen, by means of fingers, or a claim, or a bit-torrent, what it not yours, thinking that if everyone does it, it’s harder to get caught? Have you been unfaithful in your marriage, or unfaithful to your spouse even before you’ve met them?
- Have you hurt someone, bullied them, shamed them without cause? Have you despised your parents, your elders, your government, or your pastors?
- Have you despised worship or God’s word, or God’s name, or put your own will or opinion above God’s?

For no reason apart from his grace, God has forgiven all these things—all these sins. He has washed you clean of every stain of sin, and in eternity, he chose you to be his own. As we confess in the explanation of the Second Article:

**All this he did that I should be his own, and live under him in his kingdom, and serve him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, just as he has risen from death and lives and rules eternally. This is most certainly true. Amen.**