

GOOD NEWS FOR LOSERS

—MESSY (BUT BEAUTIFUL) CHRISTIANITY, WEEK 6—

1 Corinthians 1:26-31 (NIV)

I. THE _____ PICKED FOR _____

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.

II. ALL THE _____

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.

III. ONLY THE _____ THE _____

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.”

THE BOTTOM LINE

_____ Only _____ and What You Have _____

...by _____ yourself and pledging _____ to _____ (with _____!).

...by _____ that you are a _____ in every _____ that _____ (we _____!).

...by _____ God who _____ you (and put you on _____!).

Reflections on This Passage (Craig Keener, *1-2 Corinthians*, 32-33)

“I was an atheist before my conversion to Christianity, partly out of intellectual fashion and partly out of revulsion for the allegedly Christian culture I observed. I rejected the shallow, unexamined faith of much of Western Christendom because it seemed to me that even the Christians did not believe it. How could anyone genuinely believe they served their creator, yet fail to devote their entire life and property to their ‘lord’? But I also recognized that my finite intellect could not grasp a perfect deity, and in the end it was not Christendom but Christ that won me. After my conversion I discovered the difference between nominal and genuine commitment to Christ, and my conversion involved embracing the very shame against which I had once revolted; I was not longer intellectually fashionable. Once the cross had crucified my respectability, however, I was free to pursue unfettered what I believed to be truth.

If Paul were addressing us today, he would undoubtedly invite us to recover the costliness of the cross, to embrace it and articulate its claims even when they do not prove popular. At the most basic level, his critique addresses human pride that obscures God’s infinite superiority; as Augustin declared, Jesus chose disciples of low status ‘to crush the necks of the proud’ (*Tractates on Jn* 7.17.3).

Most wisdom traditions were universalistic, but by identifying Christ and wisdom Paul asserts the truth of Christ as a meta-narrative. Greco-Roman polytheism, like relativism today, allowed many truth-claims, provided that none was exclusivist; Paul, by contrast, relativizes other claims by asserting Christ as a meta-narrative through which all other reality must be construed. This claim would clash with worldviews in his day as well as in ours (cf. 1 Cor 8:5-6). The Roman world recoiled at the exclusivism of Jewish monotheism; early Christians further tightened that exclusivism in Christ (e.g., Acts 4:12; Jn 14:6; 1 Jn 2:22-23; Gal 2:21). Like the Wisdom tradition, however, Paul is emphatically multicultural (e.g., Rom 1:16; 2:9-10; 3:9; 10:12; 1 Cor 10:32; 12:13; Gal 3:28); it is only his theological (and some moral) claims that he asserts as universals.

Paul’s argument against division also challenges today’s church. Whereas in some letters (most notably Romans) Paul reasons from the gospel to the common faith of Jewish and Gentile Christians, hence challenges ethnic and cultural division, in this letter he challenges especially division by class, status, and education. In this case, he challenges also our division over representative Christian celebrities. Today he would hardly be impressed by those who value denominational loyalties, rival theological traditions, political allegiances, or predilections for various worship styles over a common unity in Christ. Some are of Aquinas; others of Cranmer; others of Luther; still others of Wesley, Calvin, and so forth; but Christ must matter to Christians more than the teachers from whom we learned him, no matter how esteemed.”