

Title: A Cross-Driven Model

Text: 1 Corinthians 1.26-31

Theme: Who we really are and what we really have.

Series: 1 Corinthians #6

Prop Stmt.

Cathi has a cousin whose career in filmmaking took her to Hollywood, where she eventually got a job as the personal assistant to one of Hollywood's most prominent and influential actors. She was completely immersed in the world of image, stars, gossip, etc. She was good at her job, but not too long ago, she left it all behind her and moved back home. You see, there is not much reality or loyalty in the land of make-believe. Image, self, skin, impression, it sells but it is so empty.

It is pretty easy to spot people who are so "full of themselves." They talk about themselves constantly. They try to draw attention to themselves. And the sad truth is, the one who is full of himself is actually empty.

A good relationship is in many ways like an old pair of blue jeans. It is comfortable, and does not bring with it demanding expectations. A good relationship is not based on image, it has a high level of security even in reality. A good relationship is when you do not have to put out great energy in order to prop up the person, or prop up the conversation. You do not have to worry about image because you both know the truth about each other and neither is looking to the other to be the hero.

The church can and should be the arena where good relationships are enjoyed. It is the place and the people, where image does not count, but where reality really matters. The Church is to be the arena where the pressure to perform before people, is replaced by a mutual trust in, a confidence in, and an ultimate security in God. It is where we can relax in Him because His love for us is not based upon our performance, image, appearance, success, power, or influence but is based on Him, knowing the truth about us, and dealing rightfully with it. Therefore, a Christian who is in it for himself is a contradiction in terms. I made a list the other day of contradictory terms, known as an oxymoron. For example, some of the popular ones are: airline cuisine, healthy fast food, express line at the grocery store, you get the idea. But some of the ones I came up with were: Christian-greed. Christian-idolatry. Christian-liposuction. I actually googled that one and well, sad to say, there was an example. A Christianity that seeks to use God, or use the church, or use religion as a means to exalting oneself, is not true Christianity. God is not a means to be used like a commodity to get what we want out of life, God is life. He is the end. He is the goal.

We live in a plastic world. Loyalty and love is purchased at the altar of what you can do for me. People try so hard to impress others, so they seek to hang out with people that they are impressed with, or they re-invent themselves in some way. God offers a better way. But the church at Corinth like much of Christianity today was trying to impress people with its own version of power, intelligence and influence. The attitudes and actions of the people were in direct contradiction to the message of the cross. In fact, the

attitudes and actions of the people were not even consistent with their own position in society. Don't pretend to be something that you are not. Don't use the plastic, artificial designations of the world as the grid by which you live or the means by which you function in church. The world has its own empty standards of status, do not bring that into the church. Church is not another expression of social status. It is not another place in the world to show yourself off.

So, before you boast:

1. **Think About What You Were** (26)

Here Paul is challenging the reader to go back and remember what he/she was at the time that he/she came to Christ. The word called is referring to the internal call of God when by means of His Spirit, He not only opens the eyes of your heart and enables you to see the gospel, but He opens the ears of your heart and enables you to hear His voice calling you to believe in Him and He gives you the faith to come to Him. God calls us. But, the act of God's call is not what Paul is looking at here as much as he is focusing on what were the circumstances surrounding that time when God brought you to faith in His Son.

Think about what you were. Remember your social status back then. You were not an impressive bunch. The 2<sup>nd</sup> century critic of Christianity, Celsus took this statement of Paul's and twisted it when he said concerning Christians, "Their injunctions are like this. 'Let no one educated, no one wise, no one sensible draw near. For these abilities are thought by us to be evils. But as for anyone ignorant, anyone stupid, anyone uneducated, anyone who is a child, let him come boldly.' By the fact that they themselves admit that these people are worthy of their God, they show that they want and are able to convince only the foolish, dishonorable and stupid, and only slaves, women, and children."

But that is not what Paul had said. He said not many of you were wise, etc. That does not mean that no one in this group had any standing as the world considered social standing, it means that there were not too many. Obviously there were people of standing in the church. Chloe, Crispus, Erastus, Stephanus Aquila and Priscilla were part of those who had some measure of standing. Back in the days of the great evangelist, George Whitfield, the Countess of Huntingdon used to say that she was saved by an *m*: God's word declares "not many noble," not "not any noble."<sup>1</sup>

There was clearly social diversion in the early church and in the church at Corinth. That was an occasion that presented a problem that is addressed later in this book. But here is the point. Just because people may not have much social status, does not mean that they are not arrogant. This bunch at Corinth, did not have much to be proud about, but did that stop them? We can always find a reason to be arrogant – can't we? We can be proud of the fact that we are not arrogant – like those other jerks, who are so full of themselves. So, no matter what this world considers you to be, the ground is level at the foot of the cross. If you are a mover and a shaker in this world, God is not impressed. If you are a mover and shaker wannabe, do not come into the church in order to use it to

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<sup>1</sup> D.A. Carson, *The Cross and Christian Ministry*, p.28.

gain a status in the church that you have not been able to attain in the world. Salvation is not a human self-improvement program or image enhancer. Salvation is the radical rescue of a sinner from the judgment of God who is now set apart for the glory of God. The gospel not only unifies us, it levels us.

When I get closer to the end of the message, I will point out that these three words here in v.26 (wise, influential and noble) find their counterpart in v.30. Which is part of the grammatical structure of these verses that points to the “bam” clause in v.31 (I am quoting the great theologian – Emerril) But v.31 is where this whole thing is headed. And in fact, this passage is really an interweaving of Jeremiah 9.22-23. Alright, think about what you were when you came to faith in Christ.

**A. You were probably not considered “wise”**

The word has the idea of being clever. Paul is saying – Hey you guys, what are doing? You were not high society before you got saved. You were no big deal then, what makes you think that you are such hot stuff now?

**B. You were probably not considered influential.**

Remember that Corinth had been destroyed and at the writing of this letter had only recently been resettled as a colony, but was resettled by freedmen and persons of lower social status. This city was without doubt in the shadow of the glory of Athens. It is as if Paul is saying – you are from Corinth – for crying out loud! You were not even influential from the world’s perspective, and even if you were, you still don’t have any reason to boast.

**C. You were probably not considered noble.**

So, why is it that now you are acting like something that you never were? Did the gospel do that? Did the message of the cross give you a reason to become arrogant and self-absorbed? No! In fact, the message of the cross does the opposite.

**2. Think About God’s Wisdom. (27-28)**

Look at verses 27-28. What do you see repeated in these verses? It is the phrase, God chose. I really like how the actual word order in the original language of the NT brings this out. Literally, Paul writes, “the foolish things of the world, God chose... the weak things of the world, God chose, etc.” What is the point?

**A. God is not impressed with the things that our world is impressed with.**

Our world is impressed with wisdom, cleverness, strength, power and a sense of importance. (and God yawns) If you were picking a nation through whom to you’re your glory and wisdom, would you have picked a motley group of slaves in Egypt? If

you were picking a group of men with whom you set out to change the world, do you think you would have picked the 12?

We think that if the powerful, the rich, the athletes, the superstars, the entertainers get saved, that it would be so wonderful for the gospel. God's ways are usually not like that. Now, once in a while, one comes to faith in Christ, but what happens to them? If they are serious followers of Christ – the world treats them as if they have societal AIDS.

The lead singer of the group KORN (backwards K) announced that he came to faith in Christ. What leads me to think at this point, that he means business is the fact that the group broke up over it. I am thrilled, but that does not mean that the rock music industry is going to change. Those that used to worship him, will shun him. The world that used to be impressed with him, will treat him as irrelevant. Why spend your time trying to impress a world that God is not impressed with?

### **B. God does not choose the things that we would naturally choose.**

From our perspective, we think that God turns things upside down and inside out. In reality, our ways are upside down and inside out. God loves to show His glory in ways that surprise us. He said through the prophet Isaiah, "My ways are not your ways, neither are my thoughts your thoughts." Romans 11 says, "How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out!"

#### **1) God chooses Foolish things to Shame the Wise.**

Someone recently sent me a book on leadership in which the author wrote about laws of leadership that had to be followed. I thought it was a bit humorous to see that Jesus broke a few of those laws, but somehow he still managed to build an enterprise that has lasted a little while – hasn't it? Christ did not surround himself with the high and mighty. Christ did not hire an effective PR firm. Christ had what the world would consider 2 and 3 time losers on his staff. He chose what the world considered to be foolish, because they did not understand His ways. Now notice this, God did not choose the lowly to make them move into the upper crust of society. That is not the point. God chose the foolish because the wise thought the cross was sheer folly as a means for saving the world. God chose the weak because the strong thought they were powerful enough without God. And God chose the low and despised because the high and mighty did not care to debase themselves by attaching themselves to a crucified God. The foolish, weak and despised, however, respond more readily to the shame of the cross because they themselves are already shamed.<sup>2</sup>

#### **2) God chooses Weak things to Shame the Strong.**

God loves to pick up the scum of the earth and make them kings and priests.

#### **3) God chooses the Nobodies to Nullify the Somebodies.**

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<sup>2</sup> David Garland, 1 Corinthians p. 76 (minor re-wording)

Who is Paul talking about here? Well, obviously he is talking about us – Christians. The world loves the elite, the powerful, and the famous. God chooses the nobodies, the insignificant and the powerless through whom to show off His glory. It's kind of funny isn't it? And it is also so, very freeing! You do not need to impress God. I do not need to impress you and you do not need to impress me. We are not here to impress each other. That's the point – it's not about us – but Him. What a difference there is between relationships full of competition and relationships of comfort. The church is not a place of relational competition. We are in Christ, we can relax with each other.

During the ministry of Christ, do you remember the things that he would say and do that would just set his world off? He was not impressed with them the way they were impressed with themselves. It was as if the leaders spent all of their energy screaming, "Don't you know who I am?" when in reality all they were was titles and clothes. Christ exposed that, and they were furious. C.S. Lewis said, we are far too easily pleased. I would add, "We are far too easily impressed." We are so impressed with ourselves, that we fail to be impressed with Christ. Sometimes, the weak, the insignificant get it, while the powerful do not. Many years ago, now when Dr. Criswell was pasturing the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church in Dallas (a position he held for over 50 years), he was asked to preach at a rescue mission in Dallas. That night, one of the men who lived at the mission was at the door greeting people as they came in. This man who had been saved, was asking every person that night, if they knew Jesus. He did not know all the movers and shakers even in the church world, he just knew that people needed Jesus. That night, Dr. Criswell arrived for the meeting and was greeted at the door by this man who said, "Welcome, do you know Jesus?" Dr. Criswell, smiled and said, "I am W.A. Criswell, pastor of the 1<sup>st</sup> Baptist Church in Dallas." The man at the door, did not even hesitate, but said, "That's okay, if Jesus can forgive me, he can forgive you too, come on in."

We can see that the way the world views genuine Christians is how they viewed Jesus. As we consider these statements, I am certain that together we could literally give hundreds and hundreds of examples that would illustrate these. But the heart of the gospel is the message of the cross, and of course the cross is irrelevant if it were not for Christ. Christ is the ultimate fool, as far as the world is concerned. Christ was the weak, powerless leader who was arrested, humiliated and executed as a helpless, pathetic man. His world despised him. His world thought him to be mad. His world thought that he was weak, he was insignificant, he could be disposed of, and it would not matter. What kind of ruler would die as a criminal on a cross? To this day, that remains as a stumbling block to the Jews, and foolishness to the Gentiles. But, the cross is what turns everything upside down. The cross changes the price tags. So, before you boast, think about God's ways. He is not impressed with what the world is impressed with, nor does he choose what the world would choose.

### 3. **Think About God's Way.** (29)

When you are reading the Scriptures, pay special attention to those words, "so that." Those words point to the purpose, or the reason. In the original language of the NT, there

is a word (hina) that is usually translated as “so that.” But that is not the case here. This verse begins with another word that is also translated “so that.” It is the word (hopos). The difference is, this “so that” usually speaks of the ultimate purpose as opposed or in contrast with immediate purposes. For example, why did you get dressed this morning? The immediate purpose was to come to church. But why did you come to church? Let’s assume that it was for the purpose of honoring God. So, the immediate purpose (the “so that”) of coming to church was part of a greater purpose (the “so that”) of honoring God.

Therefore, verses 27-28 are like the immediate purposes of God and verse 29 is speaking more of the ultimate purpose of God. God’s way is to not share his glory with others. God does not bless those who boast before Him. This church had people in it who were using their status as believers as an occasion to elevate themselves, instead of humbling themselves and elevating Christ. God’s way is to save people through the cross. The cross eradicates the very things that these people were boasting in. Since we were nothing before our conversion, what makes us think that that we are now more special than others after our conversion? God does what he does so that we cannot boast before Him. He even brings us to faith in Christ in such a way that we cannot take credit for it. That is why we are justified by grace alone, through faith alone in Christ alone, because it is for the glory of God – alone. That is God’s way – no boasting before Him.

Now, remember our list of oxymorons? Christian greed, Christian idolatry, etc. Here is another to add to the list. “A proud church” A proud church is a contradiction in terms. The church is to be the most gracious, humble, happy, contented, gathering of people ever, because the ground is level at the foot of cross. And the only way you can get into the church is through the cross. For budget purposes, we did not build the large cross, that was in the original design of this building, yet. But believe me, we have not forgotten about it. I love the message that it would convey, we enter the church by means of the cross. But God forbid that I should glory except in the cross of the Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified to me, and I unto the world. (Galatians 6.14)

#### 4. **Think About God’s Work** (30)

Not only do your sources of supply – wisdom, strength ,etc come from God, but your very existence, your very being comes from God too. Your wisdom, your existence, your spiritual condition and position in Christ is because of God – not because of you. You are related to God not because you are great, but because of Christ Jesus.

Now, look at the last part of v.30. For the genuine follower of Christ, Christ is our wisdom. Paul breaks this down into three ways that show a little more explicitly how Christ is our wisdom. Paul speaks of three things that God does when you come to faith in Christ. Here we see three related things that are part of your salvation – and they are all from Christ.

##### A. **Christ is our righteousness.** (vs. the world’s wisdom)

Christ is the one whose righteous life, made Him the perfect the sacrifice, so that when you come to faith in Christ, while his death paid for your sins, his life provides the righteousness that you have to be credited with. We are not only declared righteous in the eyes of God because of salvation, we are saved from the penalty of sin, because...

**B. Christ is our sanctification.** (vs. the world's influence)

The word translated as holiness means sanctification. And here Paul is not using it in a progressive sense referring to the Christian's walk, but in a positional sense referring to the believers standing before God. Without holiness, no one will see the Lord. We cannot live with a holy if we are not holy. When you accept Christ as your Savior, Christ becomes for you the holiness that you otherwise would not possess on your own. It is through the holiness of Christ that you are allowed to approach God.

**C. Christ is our redemption.** (vs. the world's nobility)

Through Christ, we have been purchased out of the slave market of sin. He paid for us. He brought us into his family, by grace. We had nothing. We bring nothing to the table. He did not purchase us because we bring value to him or add to His worth. He purchased us because in His grace and for His purposes He chose to. That is why, if you are going to boast – you had better boast in the Lord!

Therefore: Boast in the Lord!! (31)