

August 2, 2020

Consider Your Calling

1 Corinthians 1:26-29

The medicine for self-righteousness

If God were to send you on a mission to help a Church stop quarreling with one another, what truth would you pull out of the Bible to help you? What medicine would you apply to a Church that was swallowed up in self-righteousness? Paul used election. One of the most divisive doctrines in Christendom today is the doctrine of election. Though every Christian must believe in it, at least in some shape of form, because it is found in the pages of Scripture.

Ephesians 1:4 “...even as *he chose us* in him before the foundation of the world”

2 Thessalonians 2:13 “...we should always give thanks to God for you, brethren beloved by the Lord, because *God has chosen you* from the beginning for salvation”

Acts 13:48 “...as many as were *ordained to eternal life* believed”

Many more Scriptures could be cited. But oh how this doctrine is so divisive. Many Churches simply will not teach on it because of the hot opinions on both sides. So then why did Paul use the doctrine of election—a divisive doctrine—to help a divisive Church? Because nothing destroys self-righteousness more effectively. Nothing recalibrates the fear of God in the soul of man than to realize but for the grace of God I stand condemned. Nothing nurtures true humility more than to see that it is because of God that you are a Christian, and had not God acted, you would have never come to Him.

The Big Idea...

God chose you to be in Christ Jesus—you contributed nothing *so that* no one is able to boast in the presence of the Lord

- ☆What Does Scripture Mean by “Calling?”
- ☆What Are the Objections Against God’s Call?
- ☆Why Is Our Calling So Vital to Think About?

I. What Does Scripture Mean by “Calling”?

The first sin of the church

Please look with me at v.26, Paul says “For consider your calling, brothers...” Paul begins with the word “for” which means because. But he is not connecting his thought merely to the verse before, but to his whole argument. This is Paul’s second argument for why the Corinthians have no reason to boast over one another. If you are just joining us, that’s the problem Paul is addressing. Back in v.12, the Church was dividing up into factions saying “I follow Paul,” or “I follow Apollos,” or “I follow Cephas,” or “I follow Christ.” Recall this is the first sin of the Church. We first come to Jesus Christ acknowledging that we are sinners, and then inevitably we start to find reasons in ourselves why we are better than the next guy. Churchill captured this self-righteousness so perfectly. Remember he said “We are all worms. But I really think I am a glow worm.”¹

This is how the world thinks. But Paul showed us in v.18-25 that to adopt this world’s thinking is absurd because God has destroyed the wisdom of the world. v.21 says “For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom.” Paul now shifts his argument to focusing on how a person becomes a Christian to begin with. He says in v.26 “Consider your *calling*, brothers.”

A synonym for election

Now Paul has already introduced us to calling back in v.2. “To the church of God...*called* to be saints.” It is used in different senses in Scripture. Paul in addition to being *called* as a saint, was *called* to be an apostle (v.1). So *calling* can be applied to an office. Additionally every Christian is *called* to a certain

¹ Paul Johnson, *Churchill*, (New York, NY.: Penguin Books, 2009), pg. 3

vocation in life. **7:17** says “Only let each person lead the life that the Lord has assigned to him, and to which God has *called* him.” But here the *calling* that Paul means is God’s calling us out of sin and death to salvation and union with Jesus Christ.² It is this *calling* that causes us our conversion. **2 Timothy 1:9** says “[God]...saved us and *called* us to a holy *calling*, not because of our works but because of his own purpose and grace, which he gave us *in Christ Jesus* before the ages began.” Paul is using the word “calling” essentially as a synonym for election.³ Meaning that our salvation—our calling—is a decisive, free, and sovereign choice of God. In other words, we are saved not because we are a glow worm—better than all the other worms. Salvation happens because God chose some worms to be His sons and daughters and passed over the rest. How do we know that? Let’s look at Paul’s argument.

Why does God call us?

v.26 “For consider your calling, brothers:⁴” In other words, Paul is answering the question: on what ground has God *called* us to salvation? What is the reason He calls us? First, he gives three negative answers: **1)** Not because of our intellectual capacity; **2)** Not because of our wealth or influence; **3)** Not because of our bloodline

1. Not because of our intellectual capacity

Consider the first reason God calls us: *not* because of our intellectual capacity. He continues in **v.26** “...not many of you were wise according to

² Turretin has some helpful “from which” and “to which” language. See Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Vol. 2*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.,: P & R Publishing, 1994), pg. 501

³ Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.,: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 104.

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Although these terms—election and effectual calling—theologically are different events (election happens in eternity past, and effectual calling happens in time) they are the *synonymous* in the sense that the reason God does both has nothing to do with you.

⁴ Paul again uses the word “brothers” because what He is about to say is very offensive to the flesh. He wants us to know that he is including himself in this description. Every great man and woman of God is included in this list in one sense or another (either as nobodies or as great sinners, cf. 6:9-11; 1 Timothy 1:15)

worldly standards.” *Worldly standards* means the way *the world measures things*. According to the way the world measures things, not many of you are *wise*, not many of you are σοφός sophos. We’ve seen that word already, it’s where we get the word sophisticated. The idea is not *that* many of the Corinthians were simply lacking in Greek philosophy. That isn’t the issue. It’s that many of them were uneducated, and ignorant. Paul makes the point even sharper in **v.27** “God chose what is *foolish*...” μωρός mōros in the Greek. The lexicon defines mōros as dull or stupid, a blockhead. It’s where we get the word moron. So transliterated, Paul says “God chose the morons of this world.” And this is exactly how the the world views the Christian. In 178 A.D. the philosopher Celsus scorned the Christians of his time:

“Let no cultured person draw near, none wise and none sensible, for all that kind of thing we count evil; but if any man is ignorant, if any man is wanting in sense and culture, if anybody is a fool, let him come boldly [to become a Christian]...We see them in their own houses, wool dresses, cobblers, the worst, the vulgarest, the most uneducated persons...They are like a swarm of bats or ants creeping out of their nest or frogs holding a symposium around a swamp, or worms convening in the mud.”⁵

Now on the one hand, Celsus is mocking Christians. However, Paul is not disagreeing with *part* of his assessment. God chose the mōros of this world. He did not choose *many* who brilliant or educated people.⁶ Beloved this is **the first answer** for why God called you. It is not because you or I are wise. God didn’t call us because of our intellectual prowess. In fact, according to human standards, God has chosen many foolish, moros, dull blockheads to be His people.

⁵ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 51

⁶ **Acts 4:13** confirms this. “Now when they [the rulers, elders and scribes] saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were *uneducated, common men*, they were astonished.”

2. Not because of our wealth or influence

Consider the second reason God calls us: *not* because of our wealth or influence. Paul continues in v.26 "...not many [of you] were *powerful*." Here the idea is not physical strength *per se* but rather *powerful* means the wealthy, the elite, the movers and shakers of the world.⁷ If the Corinthians were to look around in their assembly, these type of people were scarce to be found.⁸ Rather, the opposite was true. In v.27 he says "God chose what is *weak* in the world..." *Weak*, meaning, that these people are people for the most part unable to achieve anything great in this life. Think of men whom Jesus called to be His disciples in the gospels. Who were they? 8 of the 12 were smelly fisherman. The remaining 4 are unknown, which demonstrates that their occupations were of no great consequence.⁹ If a political leader of the first century were going to start a revolution as Jesus did, he would have never chosen them to assist him. They could offer Him nothing. Beloved this is **the second answer** for why God called you. It is not because you or I are powerful. Paul is telling us here: "most of you are nobodies."¹⁰

3. Not because of our bloodline

Lastly, consider the third reason God calls us: *not* because of our bloodline. Paul continues in v.26 "...not many [of you] were of *noble birth*." Not many of you were born into important families, either politically important, or of royalty. During the Great Awakening of the 18th century, George Whitefield would not only preach to the poor commoners of Moorfields but also to the nobility.

⁷ Revelation 6:15 "Then the kings of the earth and the great ones and the generals and the rich and the powerful..."

⁸ It's true that Crispus who was the former synagogue ruler was among them (**Acts 18:8; 1 Corinthians 1:14**); and the heads of important households such as Stephanus (**1:16; 16:15**) and Chloe (**1:11**), but not many of them had any significant standing in society at all.

⁹ <https://jesusalive.cc/ques155.htm>

¹⁰ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 102

"We are often tempted to think that it would be wonderful if such-and-such a great athlete—or brilliant scientist, popular entertainer, or world leader would become a Christian." [MacArthur, pg. 51] But that is not how God thinks.

Though God greatly blessed Whitefield among the commoners and granted him a great harvest of souls, the nobility largely rejected Whitefield's gospel. There were few exceptions. One was Lady Selina the Countess Huntingdon. Before her conversion, she was a moral woman avoiding the licentiousness that plagued the noble class.¹¹ Because of that “she rested in the assurance that her personal righteousness was sufficient for the saving of her soul.”¹² But when she heard Whitefield preach of the necessity of the new birth something that morality could not secure, she was shaken to her core. As she lay sick, she felt that “her best righteousness, so far from justifying her before God, appeared only to increase her condemnation...”¹³ Her biographer wrote: “...from her bed she lifted up her heart to God for pardon and mercy through the blood of his Son. With streaming eyes she cast herself on her Savior: “Lord, I believe, help thou mine unbelief!” Immediately the scales fell from her eyes; doubt and distress vanished; joy and peace filled her bosom, and with appropriated faith she cried: ‘My Lord and my God!’”¹⁴ Later when she discovered this verse from Paul “Consider your calling...not *many* [of you] were of *noble birth*.” She said “Blessed be God, it does not say ‘not *any* [of you] were noble.’ I owe my salvation to the letter “m.”¹⁵ Selina understood that that here nobility achieved nothing for her in the sight of God. But in fact, for the first part of her life it prevented her from trusting Christ, because she was trusting in her status.

Bloodlines mean nothing to God. In fact, look at **v.28** “...God chose what is low...” Stop. God chose *the low*—the Greek word means those of no family, of

¹¹ Many in the noble class were completely adverse to Whitefield's message on the ground of their nobility. The proud Duchess of Buckingham told Selina: “It is monstrous to be told, that you have a heart as sinful as the common wretches that crawl on the earth. This is highly offensive and insulting; and I cannot but wonder that your Ladyship should relish any sentiments so much at variance with high rank and good breeding.” Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival Vol. 1*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2014), pg. 132

¹² Arnold Dallimore, *George Whitefield: The Life and Times of the Great Evangelist of the Eighteenth-Century Revival Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 262

¹³ *ibid*

¹⁴ *ibid*

¹⁵ Source: <https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/blogs/justin-taylor/saved-by-the-letter-m/> Accessed August 1, 2020

no reputation, those who are low born. Onesimus in the book of Philemon was a slave that God called to Himself. Paul told Philemon "...receive him as you would receive me...not longer as a slave but more than a slave, as a beloved brother" (**Philemon 1:17, 16**). Paul considered himself on the same ground as this low-born slave. Why? Because God called him.

Again, **v.28** "God chose what is...*despised* in the world." This Greek word means all those who are those altogether unimpressive and contemptible. When Jesus when on His way to Jerusalem, a great crowd was following Him. On the side of the road, there was a blind beggar asking Jesus to have mercy. **Mark 10:47** records that "...he began to cry out and say, "Jesus, Son of David, have mercy on me!" But the crowd told him to shut up and not bother the Master. But Jesus stopped, and called the man to Himself. And then Jesus healed him. And then the gospel writer Mark tells us this man's name Bartimaeus. This is recorded in history. Ask yourself: do history books typically name blind beggars as significant figures? No "this individual would [have] be passed over, nameless...only those with wealth or influence would be named in literary works, but in this case [Bartimaeus] was given the dignity of being named."¹⁶ Why? Because "God chose what is... *despised* in the world."¹⁷

Again in **v.28** "God chose...even the things *that are not*..." To the Greek culture, especially the philosophers, this would have been greatest contempt. "Being" or "ontology" (the study of being) was their most valued ideal. "...To be called nothing (*the things that are not*) was the worst insult."¹⁸ But that is precisely what Paul is saying here: the people that God chooses or elects are "nothing" when judged by human standards. So beloved, this is **the third answer** for why God called you. It's *not* because of your bloodline, *not* because you were born into a special family, *not* because you are black or white or brown or any other color. On the contrary, as Charles Hodge sums up these three things: "The

¹⁶ Stephen T. Um, *1 Corinthians: The WORD of the CROSS, Preaching the Word*, Series Editor R. Kent Hughes, (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway, 2015), pg. 38

¹⁷ cf. James 2:5

¹⁸ MacArthur, pg. 51

things which elevate man in the world, knowledge, influence, rank, are not the things which lead to God¹⁹ and salvation.”²⁰

Because of Him, you are in Christ Jesus

What then *is* the reason God calls us? What *is* the cause of our salvation? Paul gives us the positive answer in **v.30** “And *because of him* you are in Christ Jesus...” In other words, there is no *cause* in you there is no *cause* in me. It is *be-cause* of Him. The blessed Paul is showing us that there are no conditions that we must meet in order for God to call us to His Son. We bring nothing. No conditions. Just as the wise, powerful and noble were not chosen *because* of those things; so the foolish, weak, and despised were not excluded because they lacked them.²¹ We are called, chosen, saved, converted because of Him, and nothing in ourselves. That’s Paul’s entire point. The Corinthians were puffed up because they thought that there was something in them that caused them to be better than others. It was the same problem ancient Israel had. God told them in **Deuteronomy 7:6-8** “The Lord your God has chosen you to be a people for his treasured possession, out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth. It was not because you were more in number than any other people that the Lord set his love on you and chose you, for you were the fewest of all peoples, but *it is because the Lord loves you...*” Why did the Lord choose us? Because He loves us. But why does He love us? What is it in us that makes us lovable? Nothing. He loves us *because* He loves us. We are just like Lazarus, the only thing we contribute to God’s calling is the smell of death. Remember what Martha said in **John 11:39** before Jesus raised him from the dead? “Lord, by

¹⁹ Luke 16:15 “For what is exalted among men is an abomination in the sight of God.”

²⁰ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 25

²¹ “There are some foolish persons that make this a pretext for not merely triumphing over the great, as if God had cast them off, but even despising them as far beneath them. Let us, however, bear in mind, that this is said to the Corinthians, who, though they had no great distinction in the world, were nevertheless, even without any occasion, puffed up. God, therefore, by confounding the mighty, the wise, and the great, does not design to elate with pride the weak, the illiterate, and the abject, but brings down all of them together on one level.” John Calvin, *Calvin’s Commentaries Vol. XX*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: BakerBooks 2009), pg. 90

this time *there will be an odor*, for he has been dead four days.” Though he stunk of death, Jesus raised him because He loved him.²² Beloved though you had the stench of sin and death upon your soul, God He loved you and chose you and gave you to His Son Jesus Christ. As the poet John Cennick put it

“Lo! glad I come; and Thou, Blessed Lamb,
 Shall take me to Thee as I am;
 Nothing but sin have I to give;
 Nothing but love shall I [be given²³].”²⁴

Now why is Paul laboring this point? The Corinthians were proud *precisely* because they at the very least practically denied this doctrine. If you ever come across a proud Reformed person, it is because they are on a practical level denying the doctrine of God’s election. We did not come to faith because we were wiser or more powerful or more noble than others. We came to Christ *only* because God called us. The reason why the reprobate do not come to Christ is because God does not call them. The difference between Heaven and Hell for you is *not* something in you. It is because of Him that you are in Christ Jesus. That’s our **first point**. God’s calling is his free decisive, sovereign act that places us in Christ Jesus apart from anything that we contribute. God proves this by choosing the foolish, weak and despised things of this world. Things like you and me.

²² John 11:5 “Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus.”

²³ original “receive”

²⁴ Dallimore (Vol.2), pg. 1741

II. What Are the Objections Against God's Call?

I think that it would be helpful for us to address some objections against this doctrine because there are some serious ones, and the Bible does have answers. So here are six objections against this doctrine.

Objection #1: God calls everyone to be saved

Acts 17:30 says "God...commands all people everywhere to repent." God calls everyone to believe, to repent, to be saved, therefore to speak about a special call to only some is contrary to Scripture.

How do we answer this? This objection fails to distinguish between the internal call and the external call.²⁵ The *external call* is simply the audible proclamation of and invitation to believe in the gospel of Jesus Christ. Whenever the gospel is preached, an external call is given. But the internal call is different. The *internal call* is the secret work of the Holy Spirit in which He persuades and enables a person to believe the gospel. Without the internal call nobody would believe the gospel because we are dead in our trespasses and sins. We need to be raised from spiritual death, we need to be born again in order to believe, that is what the inward call accomplishes. Jesus said in **John 6:44** "No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him." That's the inward call. God has not *inwardly* called everyone to be saved, because if that were the case then everyone would be saved.²⁶ But Scripture is clear that on the day of Judgment, when the world is facing King Jesus, some will depart into eternal punishment and some to eternal life (**Matthew 25:46**).

²⁵ Lydia received the external and internal call of the gospel (Acts 16:14); Felix only received the outward call (Acts 23:25).

²⁶ Larger Catechism Q. 68. Are the elect only effectually called? A. All the elect, and they only, are effectually called; although others may be, and often are, outwardly called by the ministry of the word, and have some common operations of the Spirit; who, for their willful neglect and contempt of the grace offered to them, being justly left in their unbelief, do never truly come to Jesus Christ.

Objection 2: God does inwardly call everyone, but the problem is that some believe and some do not believe.

This is false for at least two reasons. **First**, it is simply not true that everyone who has ever lived has *even heard* the outward call of the gospel. In the OT, it was Israel alone out of all the nations on the earth who had the light of the gospel. Abraham was called out of Babylon—Abraham and his seed heard the gospel (**Galatians 3:8**), but the rest of the heathen world did not. **Psalm 147:19-20** says “He declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and rules to Israel. *He has not dealt thus with any other nation; they do not know his rules. Praise the Lord!*”²⁷ Ponder that, ever since the beginning of the world, millions of people have lived and died and who have never heard the gospel. Consider America. Even after the coming of Christ, “The entire continent was unknown and remained unknown for over 1,000 years and was deprived of the gospel.”²⁸ And even today, there are people living who will go to their grave never hearing about Christ crucified, dead and buried for sinners.²⁹ And if they haven’t heard the gospel *then* how can they believe? **Romans 10:13** “...how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard?” That’s not to say that God can never save anyone with out an audible proclamation.³⁰ But any exception proves the rule. God’s normal way of dealing with humanity, according to Scripture, is to

²⁷ Acts 14:16 says “In past generations [God] allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways.” Meaning they didn’t have the light of Scripture, let alone the gospel.

²⁸ Wilhelmus A Brakel, *The Christian’s Reasonable Service Vol. 2: The Church and Salvation*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformation Heritage Books, 1993), pg. 195

²⁹ Larger Catechism Q. 60. Can they who have never heard the gospel, and so know not Jesus Christ, nor believe in him, be saved by their living according to the light of nature? A. They who, having never heard the gospel, know not Jesus Christ, and believe not in him, cannot be saved, be they never so diligent to frame their lives according to the light of nature, or the laws of that religion which they profess; neither is there salvation in any other, but in Christ alone, who is the Savior only of his body the church.

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Is the gospel call a universal call, meaning it is to go out to everyone? Yes, in the sense, that there is no group or class of people that is unfit to hear the gospel call (1 Tim. 2:4) Yes, in the sense, that the Church is called to preach the gospel to all of creation and to make disciples of all nations (Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19). But no the word of the gospel actually has not reached every person who has ever lived (cf. Acts 14:16).

³⁰ WCF 5.3 says “God, in his ordinary providence, maketh use of means, yet is free to work without, above, and against them, at his pleasure.”

save people through the proclamation of the gospel. If someone says, ‘ah but that means that not only is a person damned because God didn’t call them, *but* also because they never heard the gospel.’ I would respond that nobody is damned because God didn’t elect them or because they never heard the gospel. Sinners are damned precisely because they are guilty before a holy God. **Romans 3:12** All have turned aside; together they have become worthless; no one does good, not even one.”³¹ All are born sinners and under the just condemnation of God because all have willfully rejected him.³² Think about if the President pardoned a man on death row. What if the other condemned prisoners said “I’m being put to death *because* the president didn’t pardon me.” That would be entirely false. The President is free to pardon one, and allow another to receive his just sentence. Those put to death are receiving precisely what they deserve.

Secondly, again to the objection that God does inwardly call everybody, *but* the problem is that some believe the gospel and some do not; I would simply ask: “then what makes the difference between those who believe and those who do not? Is the difference that some are smarter or more humble than others? Don’t you see that is what our passage denies? “Not many of you were wise... God chose what is foolish.” Paul emphasizes this truth again later in **1 Corinthians 4:7** “For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive?”³³ The Bible says over and over again that even believing the gospel is a gift of God Himself. **Philippians 1:29** “For it has been granted to you that for the sake of Christ you should...believe in him.” **Ephesians 2:8** “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this [the faith] is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.” Therefore it is not simply true that God inwardly calls everyone.

³¹ Ecclesiastes 7:20 “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”
Galatians 3:22 “But the scripture hath concluded all under sin.”

³² Romans 1:20-21 “For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world,[g] in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse. For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.”

Objection #3: Doesn't God will everyone to be saved?

After all **1 Timothy 2:4** says “[God] desires all people to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth.” How do we answer this? **First**, if you look at the context, Paul is using the phrase “all people” not to include every single person, but all types of people. In **v.1** of that passage, Paul makes reference to “all people” he means, namely kings, and all who are in high positions. He wants us to pray for them, because God desires all types of people to be saved, not merely ordinary folk. But secondly, if God absolutely wanted everyone to be saved, everyone would in fact be saved for as **Daniel 4:35** says “...he does according to his will among the host of heaven and among the inhabitants of the earth; and none can stay his hand or say to him, ‘What have you done?’” There are numerous passages that show that God chose to call some to salvation while passing over others.

Matthew 11:25 “Jesus declared, ‘I thank you, Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that you have hidden these things from the wise and understanding and revealed them to little children.’”

Luke 8:10 “To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of God, but for others they are in parables, so that ‘seeing they may not see, and hearing they may not understand.’”

Romans 9:18 “So then he has mercy on whomever he wills, and he hardens whomever he wills.”³⁴

³⁴ also cf. Romans 9:11-13 though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad—in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of him who calls—she was told, “The older will serve the younger.” As it is written, “Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated.” Also Christ's calling is seen in saving the one thief on the cross “Today you will be with me in paradise” while passing over the other one.

John 6:37 “All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never cast out.”³⁵

Objection #4: Calling is based on God’s foresight not on God’s free choice.

In other words, God can see ahead of time those who will believe, and He elects based upon that foreknowledge. **1 Peter 1:1** is often quoted, Peter addresses his letter “To those who are elect exiles...according to the foreknowledge of God the Father...” How do we answer this? Foreknowledge in this place *does not mean* God’s knowing what will take place ahead of time. It means God’s eternally loving His people. We are elect because God foreknew us. The word “knowing” in Scripture speaks often means loving. He told Israel in **Micah 3:2** “You only have I *known* of all the families of the earth.” He didn’t mean that God didn’t know about the other nations, or that He was ignorant of them. He meant that He knew or loved Israel in a special way which He didn’t do for the other nations. Furthermore we’ve already seen that God gives faith as a gift. It’s a contradiction to the character of God to suppose that He has to learn that we would believe, when the very act of believing is a gift from Him. No, we believe the gospel *because* He calls us. He doesn’t call us *because* He sees ahead of time that we will believe the gospel. **Acts 13:48** says “as many as were *appointed to eternal life* believed.”

³⁵ On this passage, especially v.44-45, Turretin says “As to the drawing of the Father, since no one can come to Christ, except the Father draw him; and no one is drawn who does not come because whoever has heard from the Father and is taught, comes to him (as it is added in the same place)—it is evident that all are not drawn by the Father because all do not come to Christ.” Turretin, pg.514

Objection #5: If God commands us to believe, which we cannot do unless He calls us, then He is commanding us to do something we cannot do.³⁶

To this we agree. God does command something of us, namely to believe, which we cannot do without His sovereign and free grace. Beloved this is the most humbling truth that faces the sinner. Salvation is impossible on our end. **Romans 9:16** “So then it depends not on human will or exertion, but on God, who has mercy.” Believing the gospel depends upon God having mercy on us.³⁷

Objection #6: We should not teach these things because they damage a person’s self esteem and therefore are not helpful.

J.I. Packer encountered this objection decades ago. He said that there were those who said that “these doctrines...are not ‘helpful’: they would drive sinners to despair, by suggesting to them that it is not in their own power to be saved by Christ...[therefore] we appeal to men as if they all had the ability to receive Christ at any time...we speak of God’s love as if it were no more than a general willingness to receive any who will turn and trust; and we depict the Father and the Son, not as sovereignly active in drawing sinners to themselves,

³⁶ This was the principle argument between Augustine and Pelagius. Augustine prayed “Command what Thou will, and will what Thou command.” Pelagius objected that God would never command something that we don’t have the power in ourselves to do. But Scripture contradicts this on every point. The natural man ought to call upon the Lord to be saved-Acts 2:21; but no one calls on God-Isaiah 64:7. The natural man ought to choose the LORD and serve Him-Joshua 24:15; but Joshua immediately told the people you will not be able to serve the Lord-Joshua 24:19. The natural man is called to know God to have eternal life-John 17:3; but the natural man cannot know God-1 Cor 2:14. We are told to be perfect as your heavenly Father is-Matt 5:48; but If we say we are perfect, we make God a liar-1 Jn 1:10. The natural man is told to please God by faith-Hebrews 11:6; but the natural man cannot please God-Romans 8:7-8. We are told to be holy for the Lord God is holy-Lev 11:44; but there is none holy or righteous-Romans 3:10. We are told to fear God and keep His commandments-Ecclesiastes 12:13; but there is no fear of God in the natural man-Roman 3:18. The natural man is told to come to the Lord Jesus Christ--Matthew 11:28; but no one can come to Him unless the Father draws him-John 6:44, 65. We are told to glorify God in ALL that we do-1 Cor. 10:31; but all fall short of the glory of God-Romans 3:23. The natural man is told to seek after God while He may be found-Isaiah 55:6-7; but there is NONE that seeks after God-Romans 3:11.

³⁷ An additional objection: “It is absurd for God to call someone to believe the gospel whom God knows will not believe *and* whom He will withhold the grace that is necessary to believe.” Why? Can’t God have other purposes for giving some men an outward call but not the inward call? Isn’t it possible that God is doing this to render man more inexcusable (John 15:22); and to store up more wrath so He can demonstrate His mercy (Romans 9:22-23); and so that He can be more glorified in the display of His justice? (For further reading on this, cf. Brakel pg. 206 and Turretin pg. 515)

but as waiting in quite impotence “at the door of our hearts” for us to let them in.”³⁸ But as Packer said “The Bible is against us when we preach in this way.”³⁹ Beloved don’t you realize that God is actively trying to shatter our self-esteem *in this very passage?* Consider what Paul says in **v.27-28**. Why does God choose the foolish, and the weak? To *shame* the wise and the strong. What does it mean to be put to shame? Here it means to have your reputation injured in your own eyes. It means to be humiliated over what you are. That’s how Luke uses the word in **Luke 13:17**. When Jesus turned the demonic reasoning of the Pharisees on their own heads, it says “all His opponents were being *humiliated*.” Same Greek word. Furthermore in **v.29**, why does God chose the low and despised? In order “*to bring to nothing* things that are.” That phrase—to bring to nothing—means to empty a person of his own power. It means for a person’s own ability to be completely nullified. Don’t you see? It is precisely God’s aim to drive a person to despair. I don’t mean that God’s aim is to drive them to despair regarding God’s ability or intention to save sinners. Rather I mean that it is expressly God’s aim to drive a person to despair regarding their own ability to come to God. What was the Corinthian’s primary problem? They were full of self-esteem, full of self-sufficiency, full of self-righteousness. And as a result they had very low esteem for God. Dear congregation, this is the problem of every human being—you and me included. It’s why we fight and argue. It’s why we get so offended when we perceive being slighted by others. It’s why we make factions in the church. It’s the root cause of a thousand problems. How did Paul seek to remedy this problem? To remind them that they had nothing to do with bringing themselves to God. **v.30** “And *because of him* you are in Christ Jesus.” Why is it that you are destined to be with Jesus forever in glory and your neighbor to hell? It is “not because of your righteousness or the uprightness of your heart”, as Moses told Israel in **Deuteronomy 9:5-6** “for you are a stubborn people.” It because, as Paul says in **Ephesians 2:4-5** that “God,

³⁸ J.I. Packer in his introductory essay in John Owen’s *The Death of Death in the Death of Christ*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2007), pg. 2

³⁹ *ibid*

being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us, even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved. That’s our **second point**. Any objection against God’s sovereign call of man ends with man self-esteem still intact.

III. Why Is Our Calling So Vital to Think About?

The imperative imperative

v.26 is an imperative, it is a command. What is the command? *Consider*. “*Consider* your calling.” What does it mean to consider something? It means to turn your thoughts towards something, to direct your mind at something, to contemplate it, to think seriously, carefully, reflectively about it. Paul is not asking us to do some great work here, he’s simply asking us to put this doctrine before our minds to at look it and behold it. Do you see that if we avoid this subject, we can’t obey Scripture? So then why is this so vital to think about?⁴⁰ The answer comes in **v.29**. God calls us in this manner—sovereignly, freely, without anything praiseworthy foreseen in us—“*so that* no human being might boast in the presence of God.”⁴¹ To boast literally means “to blow up, puff up, swell.” Think of a balloon. The actual size of a balloon is very small, but when it is filled with hot air, it swells up bigger than it actually is. That’s what boasting is, it is making yourself bigger than you actually are. God’s aim in teaching you about His sovereign call, is to deflate you, to put you in your place. It is to eliminate your ability to boast.

⁴⁰ One transformative but subordinate reason is because we are “transformed by the renewal of your mind” (**Romans 12:2**).

⁴¹ This whole section is an allusion to Jeremiah 9:23-24 Thus says the Lord: “Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the Lord.”

Not merely desire *but* ability

Several years ago, my dad and I were talking about this verse, and he asked an amazingly good question: he said “Doesn’t just mean that when we are in the presence of God, we will have no *desire* to boast?” The answer is yes and no. It’s true that we will have no *desire* to swell ourselves up in the presence of God, because we will be face to face with the Son of God, all the former things will have passed away, and we will enter into the joy of our Master. There will be no desire to boast. But that’s not where Paul stops. He means that we will have no ground to boast, no ability to boast. If we all stand naked before God, we will not be able to boast about our fine clothes. Don’t you see beloved? That’s Paul’s entire aim in this chapter. His argument will not work, if we have one thing that we can contribute to our calling. That one thing would be a ground for boasting. That’s why even our faith must be a gift, because *if* the difference between you in heaven and your lost neighbor in hell is because *you* believed, then you have a ground for boasting. No the difference between you and your lost neighbor is God chose a foolish and weak thing like you so that you have no ground to puff yourself up.

The infinite chasm

Dear congregation, this is why it is so vital to *consider* our calling. God is not aiming at mere intellectual knowledge. He wants us be in awe of Him—of His sovereign freedom in choosing us, when nothing in us compelled Him to do so. “The reason why grace is so little appreciated...is because we do not see much more than a half step between God and our sinful selves...[instead] of an infinite chasm.”⁴² *Consider* that infinite chasm: that no amount of your good works could ever fill. *Consider* your helplessness when you stand before Him on that Great day. *Consider* what it would mean for your eternal soul if God would have passed over you—if you were Esau instead of Jacob. *Consider* what God did to make you His Jacob. He did not stop at *merely* choosing you. No this

⁴² Albert N. Martin, *The Practical Implications of Calvinism*, (Carlisle, PA.,: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2010), pg. 8

gracious and loving God, this God who is full of steadfast love and faithfulness sent His beloved Son into this world. Jesus Christ the Lamb of God slain for sinners, slain for you. *Consider* that God instead of being angry at you for your deplorable sins, He focused all His wrath on His own Son. *Consider* that agony that Christ felt for all your sins, even the smallest ones. *Consider* that He was buried and three days later He rose from the dead. *Consider* that this resurrected King of Glory, instead of being angry with his disciples for abandoning Him, said “Do not be afraid...peace be with you.” *Consider* that when God called you to believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, you granted you the very faith and repentance you needed. *Consider* that He has already guaranteed the ending of your life. “He who began a good work in you will bring it to completion at the day of Jesus Christ.”⁴³ *Consider* that Jesus Himself is preparing a place for you right now. “...if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to myself, that where I am you may be also.”⁴⁴ *Consider* that when you are in His presence, you will experience fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore. *Consider* that all of this is only possible, not because you chose God, but because He chose you.

“How do I know if God has chosen me?”

If you are here this morning, and you know that you have not experienced this call, perhaps you are despairing. Perhaps you are saying to yourself, “I’m too great of a sinner for God to call me.” Perhaps a message like this has brought you to see the hopelessness of your condition. Dear friend that is a good thing. Now you see, what God wants you to see. You don’t just need a little help from God, you need a supernatural work of grace. You need Him to call you. But perhaps you will say “But how do I know if God has chosen me?” Here’s my answer, you will never be able to answer that question by looking at yourself. The only way you will know is if you respond to the gospel. Will you have Jesus Christ to be Your Lord and Savior?

⁴³ Philippians 1:6

⁴⁴ John 14:3

Not In Me

[v.1]

No list of sins I have not done,
No list of virtues I pursue,
No list of those I am not like
Can earn myself a place with You.

[v.3]

No separation from the world,
No work I do, no gift I give
Can cleanse my conscience, cleanse my hands;
I cannot cause my soul to live.
But Jesus died and rose again—
The power of death is overthrown!
My God is merciful to me
And merciful in Christ alone.