

## Upside Down!

### 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

Grace to you and peace, from God our Father, and our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. Amen.

Paul went to Thessalonika and for three Sabbaths reasoned with them from the Scriptures, explaining and demonstrating that the Christ had to suffer and rise again from the dead, and saying, “This Jesus whom I preach to you is the Christ.” But some local Jews who were not persuaded, in fact, who hated Paul because He preached Jesus as God’s Christ, stirred up the populace. They brought a crowd to the house where Paul was staying, but did not find him. So, they dragged off Jason, the owner of the home where Paul was staying. They accused him... “These who have turned the world upside down have come here too. Jason has harbored them, and these are all acting contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying there is another king—Jesus.”

Why do they hate Jesus? Because it means they cannot be saved by their works, their following of the Law. Why do they hate Jesus? Because it means that the Jewish leadership is guilty of having God’s Christ crucified.

Christ crucified is a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles. Everything is turned upside down in Christ Jesus. Consider the words of our text. For consider your calling, brothers: not many of you were wise according to worldly standards, not many were powerful, not many were of noble birth. But God chose what is foolish in the world to shame the wise; God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God.

So, do we have the wise, or powerful, or noble born in our congregation? If we do, I am not sure who they are. If we were to look at our membership in regard to worldly standards, we are not those things. In fact, according to the world we are the foolish and weak. The world laughs at us.

One of the most popular Christian books out there is entitled, “The Power of I Am.” It was written by Joel Osteen and is nothing more than a rewrapping of “The Power of Positive Thinking” in Jesus wrapping. Mr. Osteen tells you that you need to search within yourself to unlock the power within you. I am strong, and strength flows from within me – I am blessed and blessing flow from within me.

This is exactly the worldly view of things.

So, what does God say about this? What does God say about finding your blessings or strength within yourself? What is it that dwell within you? For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the willing is present in me, but the doing of the good *is* not. For the good that I want, I do not do, but I practice the very evil that I do not want. But if I am doing the very thing I do not want, I am no longer the one doing it, but sin which dwells in me. (Romans 7:18-20) According to our flesh, there is nothing but sin within us.

As for the strength of Christians? We must join Paul who was inspired to proclaim about himself and all Christians, “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.” (Phil. 4:13) Or when he says, “Therefore, I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Corinthians 12:10)

We like the idea of positive thinking. Even Christians do not like to be told that we are weak. We like to have our ego stroked so we can think good things about ourselves.

In fact, many Christians believe the Gospel of good news is some preacher telling us how we can do great things, if we only try hard enough. We can have all we desire if we only pray hard enough. It is up to you to be all that you can be. If only we only reach down to the goodness within our hearts.

Along comes God's Word which turns it all upside down – all our righteous deeds are like filthy rags. (Isaiah 64:6) Jesus Himself proclaims, "For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man." (Matt. 15:19-20)

It doesn't sound good! In fact, it sounds wrong. Do you remember when they stole baby Jesus from the crèche outside Zion, and then it was returned? Channel 5 was told that Jesus was returned, and so the reporter came to interview me and asked, "Doesn't this restore your faith in humanity?" I gave a great reply about how it did not, but it showed me that God could reach a heart and change it, turn it around, and we were blessed to speak a word of forgiveness instead of pressing charges. That response did not make it into the news – but my answer to a completely different question was used in a twisted way to make it appear that this had restored my hope in humanity.

They turned my response upside down in order to lessen God and show man's great ability to be good.

John is in the wilderness preaching a baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sins – and Jesus comes to him to be baptized by him. John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" "This is upside down cousin! You are without sin! The Holy Spirit has revealed to me that you are the Lamb of God. You are the Christ! I am not worthy to untie your sandal! I need what you bring! There is no need for you to be forgiven."

But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." "Yes John, it is upside down, but do this now. I am being baptized to cleanse all water and make it a salutary flood. I am being baptized into your sin and the sins of all people. In doing this I will fulfill all righteousness for you and all people. I will cleanse all water of sin and take it to the cross."

The Father spoke from heaven saying, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

I know He is not talking about me – He is not pleased with how I love Him, how I love my wife, how I love all my neighbors, and I am sure He is not pleased with how I sometimes speak about that guy who lives in that one white house.

Dear friends, God turned it all upside down when He gave His perfect Son to be the sacrifice for my sin – and yours. He took my sin and gives me His perfection. He took my death and gives me His life. It is all upside down!

That is why I boast in Christ, for in my baptism I was united to Christ – all that is His is mine – His life, His perfection, His strength, and His resurrection are all mine.

You and I are strong, for Christ strengthens us. You and I are blessed, for Christ comes to us and gives us His blessings. It is all turned upside down so that we can be a blessing to others, for Christ has blessed us.

Let us pray that Christ ever keeps us mindful of His blessings to us as He continues to come to us and build us in the true faith. Let us take the opportunity to express the joy in our lives, that in Christ we can proudly proclaim that our lives are upside down, just as it is written, "Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord." Amen.