Scripture Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:26-31

[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."

Justification and Other Benefits

There is a famous Middle Eastern folk tale about a poor young man who finds a magical oil lamp containing a wish-granting genie. Through the power of the magic lamp, Aladdin gained immense wealth, including a magnificent palace, piles of gold, precious gems, and an array of servants. Then what do you think Aladdin did? Did he go on living as he had before? No way! He knew what those gifts were worth and he knew that they had the power to help him achieve the desires of his heart beyond just accumulating material things. He used these riches to win the heart of the emperor's daughter.

When we receive Jesus as our Lord and Savior, God welcomes us into his family as his beloved adoptive children, and, according to Ephesians 1:3, blesses us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ. Like Aladdin, our lives change. We don't just walk back to our old life and ignore our newfound riches. We open up these many blessings, learn about them, and utilize them for their intended purposes. Today we look at some benefits that we share with all who are effectively called into the kingdom of God. These include justification, adoption, sanctification, and other benefits that either go with them or come from them.[1]

Our scripture reading this morning encourages us to contemplate who we were before God called us into his family, highlighting the contrast between *worldly* values and *godly* values. We were not wise, influential, or of noble birth. We were foolish, weak, and lowly. Paul points out that God shames the wise, the strong, and the noble in calling us who are none of those things, to be his people. Why? So that we may not boast in ourselves, but rather in God. God wants us to know that he did not call us because *we* are so great, but because *he* is so great.

God called the weak and ignorant first, but not exclusively: shepherds first, then wise men; fishermen first, then the educated, like Paul. "The ancient Christians were for the most part slaves and men of low station; the whole history of the expansion of the church is in reality a progressive victory of the ignorant over the learned, the lowly over the lofty, until the emperor himself laid down his crown before the cross of Christ" (Alford, quoting Olshausen). Nothing of the flesh will stand before God. No one can say that they have figured him out or that God did what they thought he should do. God's ways are greater and higher than ours, and all glory goes to him.

God is the one who brought us to Jesus. Paul writes that Jesus became our wisdom in verse 30. This is one of the many benefits that we have in him. Then Paul goes on to tell us that that wisdom is righteousness, holiness, and redemption. These are more benefits that we have in Jesus. This wisdom from God is not the wisdom of the world; it is in contradiction to man's natural expectations. It's a wisdom learned in and through Jesus. Jesus *is* our wisdom; he *is* our righteousness; he *is* our holiness and sanctification; he *is* our redemption.

Jesus is our righteousness because we are declared "not guilty" by his atoning work on the cross. He is our righteousness because his righteous deeds and character are accounted to us. Verse 30 tells us that he became our righteousness. "He leads [us] in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Psalm 23:3b ESV). He "makes [us] complete in every good work to do His will, working in [us] what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ" (Hebrews 13:21a ESV).

Jesus is our sanctification because as we focus on him we grow separate from the world, and more and more like him. He is our redemption because he has purchased us for freedom, to set us free from bondage to sin. *Redemption* is a word from the slave trade. Like slaves, we can't free ourselves from bondage to sin, but Jesus can and has purchased our freedom for us on the cross. These gifts: wisdom, righteousness, holiness and redemption are more benefits of life in Jesus.

Why did God do it this way? Paul refers to Jeremiah 9:23-24 in verse 31 of our reading today to show that God did it this way so that he would get all the glory. Before his arrest, Jesus prayed that he would glorify his Father in his final hours, as he had glorified him in finishing the work on earth that God had given him to do. (John 17:1-4). The path to God's glory is Christ crucified; the evidence of God's glory is his choice of the lowly like me and you.

The effectively called share these benefits, which are absolutely tied up with effective calling. Calling, in the Biblical sense of the word, cannot fail or remain ineffectual. Effectual calling has the power to produce the intended effect – to enable us to embrace Jesus. It also has the power to grant many benefits. The primary benefits are justification, adoption and sanctification. Our effective calling gives us *justification* by communion in the righteousness of God. Our effective calling gives us *adoption* by giving us our spiritual Father through our relationship with Jesus. Our effective calling gives us *sanctification* by giving us the strength of Jesus in our relationship with him, which gives us the ability to live as Christians should live.

Our response to these benefits should be diligence to make our calling and election sure. We read in 2 Peter 1:10: "Therefore, my brothers and sisters, make every effort to confirm your calling and election. For if you do these things, you will never stumble." We should be thankful for our justification, adoption, and sanctification, and show our gratitude by praising and serving God. And we ought to look forward to the day when, by His grace, He will be glorified - knowing that such is the hope of those who have been predestined, called, and justified.

So, what is justification? Justification is the act of God's free grace by which He pardons all our sins and accepts us as righteous in His sight. He does so only because He counts the righteousness of Christ as ours. Justification is received by faith alone.[2] In 2 Corinthians 5:19, we read "that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them." In the New Testament, justification means "to deem to be right." It signifies showing and declaring to be right or righteous. God is the author of our justification. It is an act of God's free grace, freely given through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ. God's grace is the deepest ground and the final cause of our redemption. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7).

This justification is a continuing act as the Lamb of God continues to take away the sins of the world (John 1:29). Furthermore, we are not only pardoned, but also God does not abhor us, but accepts us as righteous. This is possible because his righteousness is made ours by imputation. "To the one who does not work but trusts God who justifies the ungodly, their faith is credited as righteousness" (Romans 4:5). We are justified purely by faith without any kind of work being involved.

John Stott said that the first calling of the church is to holiness.[3] This holiness is developed in us as God sanctifies us and imputes the righteousness of Christ to us. *Justification* is by faith alone without works, but *sanctification* is by faith and works. God has prepared good works for us to do, and effective calling results in our doing those works. This life is not a veneer of piety with the old pagan underneath when you scratch the surface. Rather, true conversion is a deep and radical process which transforms the old life of self-centeredness to a resurrected one of self-sacrifice and love.

Conversion, justification, adoption, and sanctification lead to holiness. These benefits of life in Christ bring glory to God. We need holiness, which calls us out of the world to belong to God, and worldliness, which makes us involved in the life of the world; we can call that "holy worldliness" (Alec Vidler). This holiness binds our

profession to our practice. Without it the church lacks authenticity and credibility. This holiness makes us faithful in defending and proclaiming the uniqueness and finality of Christ. We should expect to suffer for this faithfulness, and to suffer more the less we compromise.

It is the Word of God that matures the people of God. It is the *death* of Jesus that paved the way for our justification, adoption, and sanctification. It is the *resurrection* of Jesus that illumines his death. It was God the Father who raised him from the dead. God raised him to demonstrate his divine nature. Jesus "through the Spirit of holiness was appointed the Son of God in power by his resurrection from the dead" (Romans 1:4). God raised him to confirm the efficacy of his death. Jesus told us that he was going to give his life as a ransom for many, that his blood would be shed for the forgiveness of our sins. By his resurrection we can be sure that this purpose of his death has been accomplished.

God raised Jesus to complete the salvation of his people. We have died with him to sin and risen with him to newness of life. One day our new, glorified bodies will rise also. These are the stages of our salvation: justification, sanctification, and glorification. The Christian faith is the faith of Christ crucified, and the faith of Christ risen. Therefore, dear brothers and sisters, let us hold firm to our faith, persevering in love and truth, seeking God with all our hearts and souls and minds, until he comes again or calls us home.

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[1] https://westminsterseminaryuk.org/westminster-shorter-catechism-modern-english#section-1Re, 32.

[2] Ibid., 33.

[3] https://www.cslewisinstitute.org/resources/an-interview-with-john-r-w-stott/

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"Come to where Christians are not ashamed of the Image of their Creator"