

**1 Corinthians 1:26-31**

January, 11, 2009 – EPIPHANY 1, BAPTISM OF OUR LORD

**God Sets His Own Standards**† **You are chosen by grace. (vv.26-28a,30)**† **You can boast about God. (vv.28-31)**

In the name of Jesus, God's favored Son, dear baptized believers:

Have you noticed how God's Word keeps confirming itself? The last time we considered this text was January, 1996. Since then a whole lot of bragging's been going on. World trade and the galloping Stock Market could never crash experts said. They also predicted no jet could bring down the World Trade Towers in spite of the architect's fireproofing standards rejected. The brightest spot in our economy was the housing market, where investment experts were sure of nonstop gains, even though borrowing standards were ignored. How many sinners since then have tried to boast their own standards in judgment before the Almighty as if God should recognize us for our own goodness? How many times have you and I questioned God's wisdom in our lives these past years? We need this day to stand on the banks of the Jordan River while John baptizes Jesus, and the Father's voice from heaven says, "***You are my Son, whom I love; with you I am well pleased.***" (Mark 1:11 NIV) Who else thought Jesus was God's favored Son? Isn't it obvious? **God Sets His Own Standards.** Good thing too, for...

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Sports fans would be appalled at how we play the game of life. Adamites always come to the game bulked up, juiced up, with fans pumped up in the stands. No one seems to notice we line up cross ways on the field. How fast can you run the ball? How hard and long can your quarterback throw out of bounds? And why would the opposing team try to stop you if you're stuck on stupid? Human standards are always at cross purposes with God, deep in our culture. Check out the last line of Morgan Freeman with Jack Nicholson in *The Bucket List*. Freeman's character speaks as their ashes are placed side by side in peanut cans high in the majestic snow beneath a deep blue sky: "He would have approved of his final resting place because, after all, being buried on the mountain was against the law." Breaking the standards we seem to admire. We just don't like that **God Sets His Own Standards.**

In psychology it's called "egocentric," the idea that everything revolves around me. Everyone else disagrees because they think life revolves around them. Online movie and sports reviews illustrate that some folks may not know how to spell or write a coherent sentence, but they're sure of their own opinion, factual or not. Around here, a little bit different, especially those whom Garrison Keillor calls, "Lutherans." In Lake Wobegon, just about is good enough as long as everyone tried their best. But even in that mythical town religion, politics and hot dishes seem more important than God's set of **Standards.**

"So let's review," says the dear Holy Spirit through Paul: "***Brothers, look closely at what you were when you were called.***" God did the calling; look what happened. ***Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth.***" True? Besides irritating surveys, most of us aren't asked our opinion. Are you "***wise by human standards***" for an article in Wikipedia? Influential positions of power? Not us in the evening news. Well born with a name worth millions? "I wish!" By human standards we're just coveted, coveting consumers. Yet by God's **grace** we drive the economy, pay the taxes and keep Social Security solvent. God's **grace** works.

***"But God chose the foolish things...the weak things...the lowly things of this world and the despised things...."*** If you believe God created the world in six days as the Bible says, you'll never be allowed to teach it in public schools. It's less ***foolish*** by worldly standards to say, "First there was nothing, nothing blew up and became everything." If you believe a Baby born in a manger 2,000 years ago is your Savior and Lord, you could get an earful from that woman in Shoreview who lashed out at such ***weak things***. And the school bus driver with personal problems in our parking lot? Don't try to help

him with the *lowly* Word of God and sacraments. Those are the *despised things* which will earn you his anger. He'll just hiss at you: "That's too simplistic!" Then he slams the window and drives away.

Why did God do this? Didn't He know the worldly wise would despise the *foolish* six-day creation? Didn't God see the weakness of being born in a manger? Couldn't He sense how we would feel to be caretakers of such *lowly, despised* sacraments like Baptism and Lord's Supper? Yes! Yes! And yes! God knew all that. And that, dear friends, is why He did it. "***God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are....***" Where there was no water in the desert of your heart, God creates such a river of refreshment that you keep pouring out blessings as long as you are living in your Baptismal **grace**. There is no great benefit from a little bread and wine until God's almighty Word joins them by His promise to His body and blood. Then new life blessings cut the power from humanistic psychology and worldly religion lined up cross field against God. God is making one powerful point. He did not choose you for your looks or intelligence or position in life. Aren't you relieved? **God Sets His Own Standards: You are chosen by grace.** God's undeserved love for you is the sole reason, the soul-reason....

### † You can boast about God. (vv.28-31)

People have the freedom to find a million ways to run out of bounds. But on God's field there's a steep drop off to eternal destruction. God has given us just one Way to the goal of bliss and glory for which He created us. But first He has to turn us around to follow His lead and take pride in God.

Does family tree or position get us higher with God? Look in the manger. That's God's own Son come humbly to save you. Does church position earn more credits for prayer? Hand over my mouth and knees down where shepherds lately knelt. See the lowly messengers God chose for the Good News that a Savior has been born to you. "***He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, so that no one may boast before him.***" Would some altar call decision makes a closer walk with God? The Holy Spirit says, "***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. Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord."***"

Some of the most beautiful boasting is on CD loaned by one of the brothers. You may not like the nasal twang of the Grand Ole Opry. But when Vince Gill sings sweetly, simply, "Give Me Jesus," it makes you want to **boast about God**. And when Carrie Underwood revels in, "How Great Thou Art," your soul soars and you're on your feet in triumph: *And when I think that God, his Son not sparing, Sent him to die, I scarce can take it in, That on the cross my burden gladly bearing He bled and died to take away my sin....When Christ shall come with shout of acclamation And take me home, what joy shall fill my heart! Then I shall bow in humble adoration And there proclaim: "My God, how great thou art!" Then sings my soul, my Savior-God, to thee, "How great thou art! How great thou art!" Then sings my soul, my Savior-God to thee, "How great thou art! How great thou art!"*<sup>1</sup>

It's the only kind of boasting God allows. 700 years before Christ, the Holy Spirit said through Jeremiah, "***Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom or the strong man boast of his strength or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this: that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD, who exercises kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in these I delight," declares the LORD.*** (9:23f NIV) Stripping away our riches, tearing down the barrier of earthly pride between us, God did not rest, but sent His Son in Person to be "***our righteousness, holiness and redemption.***" For Jesus' sake, God says of us, "***With you I am well pleased.***" **You can boast about God.** In fact, everyone needs to know what great things God has done for you. Shine God's Epiphany light in Christ. *How great Thou art!* Amen.

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<sup>1</sup> Text, Tune, Setting: c 1953. Renewed 1981 by Manna Music, Inc., 35255 Brooten Road, Pacific City, OR 97135. International Copyright Secured. All Rights Reserved. Used by Permission.  
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