

THE RIGHT KIND OF WISDOM

TEXT: I CORINTHIANS 3:16-23

INTRODUCTION:

1. The word “wisdom” occurs 17 times in I Corinthians 1--3 (1:17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 24, 30; 2:1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 13; 3:19).
2. The word “wise” occurs 9 times in these three chapters (1:19, 20, 26, 27; 3:10, 18, 19, 20).
3. Our Lord said we are to be “wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). This wisdom does not mean cunning or worldly wisdom, but spiritual shrewdness.
4. The Greeks prided themselves on their worldly wisdom, but the apostle Paul says in verse 19, “For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.”
5. Romans 1:22 says, “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools.”
6. Sometimes Christians lack discernment and they are deceived by worldly thinking. Some are so carnally minded that they are like spiritual babies (cf. 3:1-4). And because of this they are easily deceived.
7. So, Paul says, “Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise” (3:18).
8. “Let him become a fool” (3:18) means, “Let him be willing to be regarded as a fool by the unsaved world.”
9. “Let him become a fool” (3:18) means, that taking a stand for the true Gospel, “will inevitably expose him to the charge of being a fool” (*Barnes’ Notes*).
10. Wisdom is important, but it has to be wisdom that comes from God. Proverbs 4:7 says, “Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom: and with all thy getting get understanding.”
11. James 3:15-17 contrasts the wisdom that is from above and wisdom that descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish.

12. After referring to the judgment seat of Christ (3:13-15), Paul refers to the church as “the temple of God” (3:16, 17). “Know ye not...” (3:16).

I. THE CHURCH IS THE TEMPLE OF GOD

1. The doctrine of the indwelling Holy Spirit is taught repeatedly throughout this epistle (2:4, 10, 11, 12, 14; 3:16, 17; 6:11, 19, 20, etc.).
2. Note here in verses 16 and 17, Paul uses the word “temple” (singular), not “temples” (plural). He is referring to the church.
3. Paul was not speaking to an individual, but to “the church of God which is at Corinth” (1:2). Note, “ye” (3:16, 17); i.e., plural.
4. “The church of God” (1:2) is a congregation of born again believers, indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and it is referred to here as “the temple of God” (3:16, 17).
5. Though Paul is speaking here of the church collectively, the Bible also teaches that each individual Christian is indwelt by the Holy Spirit (6:19, 20).
6. “Ye are not your own” (6:19) means we belong to God. This is the key to victory; the key to holiness; and the key to obedience.
7. I read a story about A.B. Simpson, a great preacher from the past. He was born in Canada and started his ministry there, but spent most of his life preaching here in the NYC area.
8. His desire was to minister to the flood of immigrants pouring into NYC, but he was opposed by the leaders of his Presbyterian church.
9. He eventually resigned his church and established the Gospel Tabernacle, a non-denominational church in the heart of Manhattan, where all would be welcome, even “the down-and-outers.”

10. Simpson's ministry to New York's immigrants led him to develop a great burden for worldwide missions, and through his Bible college he trained many missionaries who went out all over the world.
11. One time a young man told A.B. Simpson, "Dr. Simpson, I am all right when I am with you, but when I get away on my own I do not seem to have the strength to resist temptation."
12. A.B. Simpson told him, "Suppose it were possible for me to get inside of you and live my life in you and through you. Do you think that would solve your problem?"
13. "Oh yes, definitely," the young man said.
14. "Well," A.B. Simpson said, "you must believe that the Bible teaches that you have One much greater than I living in you. The Bible teaches that you are indwelt by the Holy Spirit. He wants to control your life and it is your privilege to let Him live in you and through you."
15. Jesus said in John 14:17, "For He dwelleth with you, and shall be in you." Romans 8:11 says the Holy Spirit "dwelleth in you."
16. Paul wrote to Timothy in II Timothy 1:14, "That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us." This is very important! "Know ye not..." (3:16).
17. There are two ways to look at the warning in verse 17. Some teach that this is a warning about a Christian defiling himself through immorality or alcohol or drugs, etc.
18. That would be a good application, but not the proper interpretation.
19. This is a warning about defiling the church, not individual believers defiling themselves. Albert Barnes said, "The figurative sense is, 'If any man by his doctrines or precepts shall pursue such a course as tends to destroy the church, God shall severely punish him.'"
20. Cf. II Corinthians 11:1-4, 13-15.

II. THE DECEITFULNESS OF WORLDLY WISDOM

1. I can understand why verse 16 follows verse 15. God is preparing us now for His judgment seat, and the local church is God's place for preparation.
2. And I can understand why verse 18 follows verse 17. When people are not actively involved in a good church they drift away from God and become entangled in all sorts of error and deception (3:18).
3. All human philosophy that is contrary to the gospel is vain deceit (3:18-20).
4. Over and over again in the Bible we are warned not to be deceived (3:18; cf. 6:9, 10; 15:33).
5. Galatians 6:7 says, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap."
6. In His Olivet Discourse, our Lord said: "Take heed that ye be not deceived" (Luke 21:8).
7. Self-deception is a big problem, even in many churches. "Seemeth to be wise" (3:18) means, "seemeth to himself to be wise." So, Paul says, "Let no man deceive himself" (3:18).
8. In verse 19, Paul quotes Job 5:13. "He taketh the wise in their own craftiness."
9. In verse 20, Paul quotes Psalm 94:11. "The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity."
10. The Christians in Corinth were "glorying" (boasting) in men (cf. 1:11-13; 3:3-6). So, Paul says in verse 21, "Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are your's." Which brings me to my last point, and to the end of chapter 3.

III. THROUGH CHRIST, ALL THINGS ARE OURS

1. "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas" (3:22a). The church in Corinth had the benefit of them, just as we benefit from the various preachers who preach in our pulpit.

2. This is the idea of Ephesians 4:11, 12. “And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ.”
3. And not only these Bible preachers, but “all things are your’s” (3:21, 22).
4. The world is ours (3:22), that is, the things which God has created – the oceans and the mountains and the birds and the flowers, etc.
5. The world is ours (3:22), that is, the universe, and all of the beautiful things which pertain to this life. The Bible says that God has given us richly “all things to enjoy” (I Tim. 6:17).
6. We have “life” (3:22). We can enjoy life – our families, our friends, travel, food, reading, music, art, hobbies, etc.
7. And while worldly people can enjoy the good things in life, they do not have eternal life. Jesus said in John 10:10, “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”
8. Not only life, but also “death.” Death is a terror for the wicked. For the lost sinner, death is often regarded as a calamity and a curse. But for the Christian it is the gateway to heaven and eternal bliss. Because we are saved we can face death with peace and calmness.
9. “And ye are Christ's” (3:23). We belong to Christ, and that is why we should not feel that we need to be devoted to any earthly leader, whether it be Paul, or Apollos, or Peter (cf. 3:4, 22).
10. Christ is God’s (3:23b). This implies no inferiority of nature of Christ to God.
11. It means only that the Son of God “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men” (Phil. 2:7).

CONCLUSION:

1. In his commentary on this epistle, John Philipps refers to a friend whose wife was dying of cancer and in great pain in a hospital.
2. The man felt terrible seeing his wife suffer, and to add to his grief some charismatics told him that if he had sufficient faith his wife would be healed. If she was not healed, then it was his fault.
3. The man was walking up and down the hospital corridor weeping when John Philipps arrived. The Lord gave Bro. Philipps wisdom as he tried to comfort his distraught friend.
4. He told him that his wife would die, but death was a gift from God because I Corinthians 3:22 says, “life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your’s.”
5. He told him that death would bring an end to her pain and suffering. Death will bring her into the presence of God in heaven.