

1 Corinthians 3:18-23 The Beauty of The Church Falls Ch. PM 2/11/2024

The topic is godly wisdom in these first 3 chapters continues in our passage.

The issue of wisdom in Corinth was being addressed by Paul in this letter.

The problem was that the believers in the church in Corinth were mixing up wisdom and foolishness. They had it backwards!

So, Paul began this paragraph with the statement, “*Let no one deceive himself.*” It was a command - that no one would deceive himself. Who did Paul have in mind here? Nobody in particular? No. Paul had someone in mind. It was any one teacher. It is any one teacher who was in verse 10 building on the foundation that Paul laid down. Let not any teacher or any disciple or any counselor deceive himself or herself. Let no one fool himself! The verb here referred to a complete deception, a thorough delusion. It was a seduction in the sense of being intellectually drawn in to a false realm of thinking. Don’t do this to yourself! Paul was pleading.

Let a person not deceive himself about what? About godly wisdom.

Again, it was not just the danger of having areas of some mistaken thoughts, but rather that the person who would deceive himself would be the person putting himself into the danger of self-inflicted blindness with regard to the church. He was ordered not to deceive himself about what the church is!

The church, says Paul, is beautiful.

Christ shows us the beauty of the church.

1. The wisdom in the church. (v.18-20)

(v.18-20), “*Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise. (v.19) For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness,’ (v.20), and again, ‘The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.’*”

Wise in this age? This phrase launched a comparison between this present age and God's coming future age. The comparison was between wisdom and wisdom. Whoever thought that he was wise, let him turn his thinking inside out. From what he thinks was wisdom, let him, according to his own scale, become a fool. But that step, once taken, brings him into a whole different realm, which would then label his new thinking as truly wise. The message of Christ crucified was labeled foolish by this age. However, it was actually wisdom.

In verse 19, Paul quoted from Job 5:13 to say that God catches the wise of this world in their questionable behavior. God knows the thoughts of "the wise (of this world)" that their thoughts are useless. What this world said was shrewd, God said was wrong and dark. What this world said was wise, God said was a waste of time.

In verse 20, Paul quoted from Psalm 94:11 to say that God knows the thoughts of the wise ones of this world, and their thoughts are nonsense.

In the same way, the believers in Corinth had fooled themselves into thinking that they were doing the right thing by dividing the church and exalting human wisdom to support their contentions with others. In the pagan culture of their city, such behavior seemed reasonable. But Paul insisted on the opposite. The wise by the standards of this world should become fools by the standards of this world in order to actually become wise. That brings us to our second point.

2. The humility in the church. (v.21)

(v.21a), "*So let no one boast in men....*"

The King James Bible brings it across this way - to glory in men!

Here Paul turns from the one individual person who supposed that he/she was wise, now to address the whole church. Paul here in verse 21 addressed all of them. No one may boast, said Paul. What was this all about? The foolishness of pride is seen in its boasting.

Paul is saying that for them to boast about a favorite person was wrong, because God gave them more than just that person. There is a wrong way to boast, and a right way to boast. Chapter 1:31, “*Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.*” We have everything that the Lord has! Wise people boast about that!

It is like what we do in basketball, for a certain key player. Basketball is a team sport! Or what we do in business, for a certain computer programmer, who struck it rich, when there were a lot of other people involved. Or what we do in the entertainment industry, for someone who has sold a lot of songs or has been in a lot of movies, when it took a lot of people to make that happen. It is more than just acknowledgement and recognition and even an award ceremony. It was glorying in a person. It was boasting in a person. Yea, he is my guy – he is highest scorer in the league. Yea, she is my favorite actress – I have seen all her movies ten times. Yes, he is my favorite businessman, I got to shake the hand of the world’s 7th richest man. Or, do you think if you met a famous chef from the Food Network, that you could avoid telling us all about it? Glorying in people.

What happens when boasting in people gets into the church? Damage. The believers were supposed to read this passage and see the seriousness of divisions in the church! Which brings us to our third point.

3. The wealth of gifts in the church. (v.22-23)

(v.22-23), “...*(v.21b)...*For all things are yours,*(v.22), whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future – all are yours, and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.*“

Over in Romans 8:38, Paul listed four of these: death, life, things present, and things to come. There in Romans 8, these four things were listed as potentially negative forces that threaten to separate the believer from God’s love. Ultimately, they cannot separate the believer from God’s love, because Christ makes sure that nothing can separate the believer from God’s love.

Here in 1 Corinthians 3:22, Paul likewise sees these four things, together with the names listed, Paul, Apollos, Cephas, or the even the world, ALL as things that are unable to defeat the Christian. All of these are gifts from God. This includes the apostles and other ministers in Corinth. God gave these persons as gifts to enrich Christians and to assist Christians. Therefore, the ministers, and the other 4 things – life, death, the present and the future – are all positive forces for good. The Christian can own them. Life is lived for God, death is gain, the present is for serving, and the future we go home to be with the Lord. We are richly blessed! Paul wrote at the very end of verse 22, “All are yours.” All of these are gifts to us believers in Christ. The creation itself is a gift from God to us. The church is a gift from God to us. All the preachers in Corinth belonged to the church in Corinth. Why would they pick out one favorite?

Verse 23 caps it all off by saying You are Christ’s. You belong to Christ. And finally, Christ is God’s.

Christ left the glories of heaven, became a man, lived a perfect life, received on the cross the penalty for sinners, and arose from the grave, all in submission to God the Father’s plan to redeem us helpless sinners.

To pick Paul and set him against Apollos or Peter or others, as the believers in Corinth were doing, was to be deceived by the world’s foolishness. Picking a favorite was what divided them, because that action unavoidably and automatically took them into a process of diminishing and reducing. To say I am of Paul, or I am of Apollos, was to say, I’ll take only a portion of the riches of what God offers us. It is silly. SI – let me illustrate the silliness of that line of thinking. If I say to my wife my favorite thing about you is the beauty of your left hand and the wedding ring, so I’m going to cut off your left hand and take your left hand out to dinner with me. That is silly and damaging! If I were I wise, I would take the whole person out to dinner, and her left hand comes along, still attached! Trying to pick a

favorite, and deny the rest would be damaging to her beauty. Just as God has put her together as she is and she must be left intact, so also God has put the church together as she is, and she must be left intact. She is sacred. No believer must be allowed to be deceived about that.

SI – Let me again show you the silliness. Imagine your car and you say, I'm of the door handle, or I'm of the steering wheel, and I'm of the hub cap. What? That would be foolish. What ought we to say instead? If we are wise, we say, I'm of the whole car, thanks be to God who gave us the car and everything attached!

To say, I am a follower of the Rev. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, is to look at a salad bar, and only take radishes onto your plate. Why say I'm of the radishes, when you could have a wonderful salad, with radishes on it and with a lot of other vegetables on it? Why say I'm a reader only of the books by The Rev. Dr. Sinclair Ferguson, when you could have a library filled with good books from many authors? Why do you have to choose R.C. Sproul, or choose Kevin DeYoung, or Craig Troxel or John Piper? Wisdom says we can have them all. It is only foolish thinking that boasts in one author, one pastor, and says my guy is better than your guy.

I am constantly amazed at the loyalty to certain brands of cars. I remember when we had cars that we were just so very glad if the car started. And all of the cars I am about to name – they start! They drive! They get us there and back! Yet one man says only Ford trucks, and all Chevy trucks are junk. Another man says only Mazda. Another man would never purchase a Subaru. Why can't we look at all the cars and say – we have our choice from them all!

Ladies have the right idea when they share recipes on pinterest. That is wise. No exclusive little groups saying, I only make recipes from Betty Crocker. I only make recipes from Taste of Home magazine. No. Ladies are wise who say - I'm open to getting a recipe from anywhere.

All Christian books belong to us. All Christians pastors work for us.

Quiz yourself – in my attitude toward authors, am I spiritual or fleshly? Am I mature or babyish? Do I have the idea that all authors and teachers belong to us as Christians, or that I must pick a favorite?

The message of God to us in these verses is that all things are designed to promote the interests of the church!

Yes, redemption itself is for us. The very work of Christ on the cross is designed to promote the interest of the church.

Romans 4:13, “...*the promise to Abraham and his offspring [was] that he would be heir of the world!...*”

Christ was sent by God the Father to become man and die and rise again to be our Redeemer. As such, Christ the Messiah takes His position as the Chief Shepherd of the Church.

Conclusion:

Remember that the beauty of the church is in all of Christ’s gifts!

Many preachers in America today are building crowds, but are not willing to pay the price to build a church. Our culture is performance-oriented. People come for the man up front. That is wrong. It is not a church. To get people to stop looking at the preacher, and instead to look at Christ and all of His gifts to the church, is what it takes to build a church.

Christ has given us all things! As the church, Jesus gave us His life to gain our salvation. The church has the Spirit of Christ. The church has mind of Christ and the wisdom of Christ. The beauty, the wonder, the amazing power and grace of Christ is seen in the people of God, the temple of God, the church.

Have you ever seen those Chinese-style dolls that the smallest one fits inside of the next bigger one, and then the next bigger one fits inside of the larger one, and that larger one fits inside of the biggest one? That is an illustration of the

wealth of gifts in the church. All are from God's hand as a gift.

God is doing something today. God is on the move in this world. God is taking unpromising building materials such as we are – sinners who struggle so much against ourselves and the world and the devil – and God is forming out of us the beautiful church of Christ, the people filled with wisdom, the people unified, and celebrating the gifts of one another, all to the praise of God. Let me read these words written by Paul in another place – over in *Romans 8:16-17*, “*The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God,¹⁷ and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ, provided we suffer with Him in order that we may also be glorified with Him.*”

Remember that the beauty of the church is in all of Christ's gifts!