

1CO 3:19-23 "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness" 20 and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." 21 So then, no more boasting about men! All things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas (that is, Peter) or the world or life or death or the present or the future - all are yours, 23 and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God."

This is our text this morning. There are many passages in God's word that deal with wisdom. Another word which is often associated with wisdom is the word understanding. To have understanding is to have a working knowledge of something and then to be able to act appropriately.

But Paul does not begin this section teaching godly wisdom to God's people as much as he warns them against a wisdom that belongs to the world and he defines such wisdom as foolishness in God's sight. Unfortunately, what may be foolishness in God's sight is not always foolishness in the sight of God's people. And so, this portion of God's word is directed towards His people to get their attention turned toward God and His wisdom.

Verse 19 of our text is actually taken from Job 5:13.

Job 5:13 ¹³ "He captures the wise by their own shrewdness, And the advice of the cunning is quickly thwarted.

And verse 20 is taken from Psalm 94:11.

Psalm 94:11 ¹¹ The LORD knows the thoughts of man, that they are a *mere* breath.

What is the point to all of this? Paul has been addressing many people in the church at Corinth as being spiritual babies who have a hard time with spiritual food to eat. Instead they can only deal with a diet of milk.

1 Corinthians 3:1-3 ^{NAU} And I, brethren, could not speak to you as to spiritual men, but as to men of flesh, as to infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk to drink, not solid food; for you were not yet able *to receive it*. Indeed, even now you are not yet able, ³ for you are still fleshly.

And then he identifies what it means to be fleshly.

1 Corinthians 3:3 ³ for you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?

Jealousy and strife are not to be the hallmarks of a true mature spiritual believer in Christ. But why were these people acting in such a way which is indicative of spiritual babies?

Paul answers it in our text this morning.

1 Corinthians 3:19 ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God.

They were employing the wisdom of this world. Well what is that? We may define the wisdom of the world as foolishness as it attempts to replace those things that define God and His ways and will.

Up to this point the wisdom of the world has been part of a theme Paul weaves through the first part of this letter.

1 Corinthians 1:19-24 ¹⁹ For it is written, "I WILL DESTROY THE WISDOM OF THE WISE, AND THE CLEVERNESS OF THE CLEVER I WILL SET ASIDE." ²⁰ Where is the wise man? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? ²¹ For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not *come to* know God, God was well-pleased through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. ²² For indeed Jews ask for signs and Greeks search for wisdom; ²³ but we preach Christ crucified, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles foolishness, ²⁴ but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.

So, Paul juxtaposes preaching Christ crucified as God's wisdom, with signs and wisdom that tantalizes the Jews and Greeks but does not satisfy their greatest need which is salvation. A very foolish game to play with eternal consequences.

1 Corinthians 2:6-8 ⁶ Yet we do speak wisdom among those who are mature; a wisdom, however, not of this age nor of the rulers of this age, who are passing away; ⁷ but we speak God's wisdom in a mystery, the hidden *wisdom* which God predestined before the ages to our glory; ⁸ *the wisdom* which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory;

Again, Paul reminds these Corinthians how the crucified Christ does not fit in with the wisdom from men who are not seeking the wisdom from God that leads to the resurrected Christ.

1 Corinthians 2:14 ¹⁴ But a natural man does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him; and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually appraised, which in the Greek means that such things are spiritually examined or investigated.

The natural man does no such investigation into the things of God precisely because he sees such things as foolish. They do not fit in with his world view which is fleshly and therefore he cannot understand them.

And in this statement Paul essentially indicts the Christians at Corinth by suggesting that they seem to be behaving more like the natural man, who cannot understand, rather than mature spiritual believers who have the Spirit who should have eyes to see as God gives the illumination.

1 Corinthians 3:18 ¹⁸ Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.

This is in the context of our text this morning and once again Paul points out how utilizing the wisdom of this age together with trying to walk in the Spirit is nothing short of deception and should be avoided. And then about mid-way through this letter Paul highlights how their foolish and fleshly behavior works itself out in ways that belie their status as Spirit born and Spirit led believers.

1 Corinthians 6:5-6 ⁵ I say *this* to your shame. *Is it so, that* there is not among you one wise man who will be able to decide between his brethren, ⁶ but brother goes to law with brother, and that before unbelievers?

And so, the point is that though it is certainly possible to walk after the wisdom of the world as believers in Christ it is simply not acceptable to do so.

In a sense what Paul is doing in our text this morning is giving a picture of the unbeliever and the wisdom he employs in life and then comparing that with the wisdom that only comes from God as he implies, 'why would any believer succumb to such thinking?'

And as if to remind these Corinthian believers of their place with God he says this.

1 Corinthians 3:21 ²¹ So then let no one boast in men.

Boasting in men here in the context is actually an irony that Paul fleshed out earlier.

^{NAU} **1 Corinthians 1:12** Now I mean this, that each one of you is saying, "I am of Paul," and "I of Apollos," and "I of Cephas," and "I of Christ."

The irony is this. Purporting to be spiritual these Corinthians were claiming a connection to men like Paul, Cephas and Apollos as if these men were superior to the other and they were able to boast in one over the other.

And then Paul even includes a group that has an allegiance to Christ which apparently excludes any spiritual significance of the servants of God just mentioned.

There needs to be a balance as the body of Christ recognizes the importance of such servants without placing them on a pedestal over the One who has purchased their salvation.

It's not as though we boast in this or that servant or that we say, 'I will only listen to Christ', but rather we should only boast in Christ as we submit to the means by which we grow, which is certainly through His word, but also as that word is taught and expounded by His servants.

Everyone has their place and we must acknowledge that as we understand that our salvation and our growth in that salvation belongs to God who causes the growth.

1 Corinthians 3:5-6 ⁵ What then is Apollos? And what is Paul? Servants through whom you believed, even as the Lord gave *opportunity* to each one. ⁶ I planted, Apollos watered, ***but God was causing the growth.***

Boasting in men unfortunately is not an endeavor only of by-gone days. We must be on guard not to place men above others or worse above Christ in our practice as if they have something to offer that God doesn't offer.

1 Corinthians 3:21 For all things belong to you,

And all things includes the hope of eternal life, the peace that passes all understanding that we find in our Savior, the gifts that enable all of us to serve to the building up of the body of Christ, and yes, even the servants that the Lord blesses His people with as Paul points out in our text.

1 Corinthians 3:22 ²² whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you,

Is there anything that God would deny His children for their growth and His glory? No. And so, whether it is servants like Paul, Apollos or Cephas, they are all given as part of the gift of salvation, which begs the question Paul has been raising; why are you boasting in men as if they had anything to do with the gift of eternal life from God?

Here is the wisdom that is from above.

James 3:17-18 ¹⁷ But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, reasonable, full of mercy and good fruits, unwavering, without hypocrisy. ¹⁸ And the seed whose fruit is righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.

Peace is from above where God has reconciled us back to Himself through the shed blood of His Son who secured that peace through His resurrection and we in Christ are the first fruits of that life.

So, where is the boasting of any sort? Our boast should be in Christ and as we follow Him and as we humble ourselves before the Lord we will let others boast of us as they see Christ in us. In fact, this is precisely what Paul did of these very Corinthians in his second letter to them.

2 Corinthians 8:24 ²⁴ Therefore openly before the churches, show them the proof of your love and of our reason for boasting about you.

This type of boasting is founded upon the love of Christ shed abroad in the hearts of His people, and in this Paul is happy to boast of His people because in boasting of them in this sense he is really boasting in the only wise God who first loved them and gave them life.

And so, in the context of Paul saying in verse 22 that all things belong to you, that is the church at Corinth, and then by extension

to every age, he is reminding them that God has called them and He is nurturing them and giving the hope that He will not only sustain them in this world but also assures them of their future by saying, "whether ...life or death or the present or the future - all are yours,"

All things are ours, even the world. In what sense? Well, where do we live? We live on this planet called earth. This is our world to the extent that God has placed us here. But for the believer it is much more significant that the world is ours. As one commentator puts it, "this world redeemed by Christ is the Christian's workshop. And in that workshop he glorifies his lord..." (Simon J. Kistemaker)

Originally, the world was created in a perfect state. When sin entered the world it was adversely affected.

ROM 8:20-22 "For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God. 22 We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time."

Many people believe that this world belongs to Satan. That could not be further from the truth. He may have authority in this world and he may be the prince of the power of the air, and he may have even deceitfully given the impression that this world is his as he offered Jesus the kingdoms of this world. Remember that?

MAT 4:8-10 Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their splendor. 9 "All this I will give you," he said, "if you will bow down and worship me." 10 Jesus said to him, "Away from me, Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only.'

Notice that Satan does not offer Jesus any real estate, but only the kingdoms of the world, which really implies authority and power.

This world was created by God and He has not given the deed to it to Satan. Listen to what the psalmist says, together with Moses who wrote Deuteronomy.

PSA 50:9-12 "I have no need of a bull from your stall or of goats from your pens, 10 for every animal of the forest is mine, and the cattle on a thousand hills. 11 I know every bird in the mountains,

and the creatures of the field are mine. 12 If I were hungry I would not tell you, for the world is mine, and all that is in it."

DEU 10:14 "To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it."

It is God's world to give and He has not given it to Satan. In fact, He has actually given it to man. This was what God spoke of after He created Adam and Eve.

GEN 1:26-30 "Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground." 29 Then God said, "I give you every seed-bearing plant on the face of the whole earth and every tree that has fruit with seed in it. They will be yours for food. 30 And to all the beasts of the earth and all the birds of the air and all the creatures that move on the ground -everything that has the breath of life in it - I give every green plant for food." And it was so."

David concurs with what God told Adam and Eve in regards to who really has been given the privilege of ruling over and managing the earth.

PSA 115:15-16 "May you be blessed by the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. 16 The highest heavens belong to the LORD, but the earth he has given to man."

And now, Paul says, that Christians should consider this earth and how God has given it into our hands to advance His will which is to bring all men into the presence of God through the truth of who He is and how that relationship is accomplished through faith in Christ.

But one day we will truly reign over a kingdom that will be transformed into the new heavens and new earth. But until that time, this world is ours to use to God's glory as we seek not to make this earth our ultimate residence, but like pilgrims, use it as a stepping stone to a greater land.

"All are yours, life and death." What a strange thing to say. But it's actually true. Life belongs to us as well as death. Life, primarily spiritual life, is ours in Christ who is the giver of life; an eternal life that will never fade or diminish in any way, reserved in heaven for us who believe. But as possessors of life, may we never forget who gave it to us.

What about death? Yes, it is ours as well. But "the great enemy of mankind has been overcome. Christ has conquered death, and through Him we have conquered death. Unless we are raptured, we will have to pass through death; but we will pass through it as its master not its slave. All death can do to the believer is to deliver him to Jesus. That is why Paul could say, "for to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain."" (Phil.1:20) (John MacArthur)

What about things present and things to come? Yes, these are ours as well. Things present includes all of life. The good, the bad, the joys as well as the disappointments, the health and the sickness. Everything in this life, both present and future are meant to be used to the glory of God and our good.

Rom.8:28 "And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose."

But things to come are not limited to what happens tomorrow, but also to what happens in eternity. And eternity in heaven with our God and Savior are just as surely ours in Christ as the very breath we have been given by God today.

Not only our present hope but the reality of that hope in the future being fulfilled belongs to these people of which Peter points to.

2 Peter 3:13-15 ¹³ But according to His promise we are looking for new heavens and a new earth, in which righteousness dwells. ¹⁴ Therefore, beloved, since you look for these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, spotless and blameless, ¹⁵ and regard the patience of our Lord *as* salvation; just as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given him, wrote to you,

Paul is telling the Corinthians that the future promise of the inheritance belongs to you but that is secured by only one thing.

1 Corinthians 3:23 ²³ and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

This brings us back to the problem of division Paul has been dealing with in this letter. In a positive way he speaks of unity. But this unity can only be accomplished in Christ. And if we are in Christ by faith we no longer belong to ourselves.

We belong to the One who purchased us by His shed blood on the cross. Our belonging to Christ is an eternal purchase. As surely as Christ is of God and we are of Christ there is an eternal connection which cannot be severed. Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ.

Our unity in the Spirit is dependent on our unity in Christ as we are united to the Father and Creator of this world. And Jesus Himself desires this unity to His glory. His prayer to the Father sums it up for us.

JOH 17:20-23 "My prayer is for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one: 23 I in them and you in me. May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

This is our Father's desire as well our Lord and Savior's desire for us. How that is accomplished is to direct our eyes off of self and the wisdom of this world and put them back on the One who is our life.

With a unity like this in the Spirit we have the same goal with the same gospel, which speaks of a magnificent Savior who has loved us with an everlasting love. May we love Him above all as we love each other, to His honor and glory.