

The unfolding of your words gives light.

The Temple of God

An Exposition of 1 Corinthians

¹⁸Let 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^a. ¹⁹For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “*He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS*”^b; ²⁰and again, “*THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS*”^c. ²¹So then let no one boast in men^d. For all things belong to you^e, ²²whether

^a 3:18 **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.** In verse 16 Paul said, “Do you not know?” Here he warns the reader not to be deceived. The deception is to think that the collective wisdom of the world can provide any spiritual benefit to the Church of Christ. It was that kind of wisdom that puffed church people up in their envy and rivalry. It is that kind of wisdom today that turns Bible studies into non-directive opinion studies.

You have to understand the context of the command to become foolish. After calling the saints at Corinth to identify as the corporate dwelling place of God instead of little pockets of party loyalists, Paul completes the thought he started in 1:18. He takes us back to the “foolishness” of God and the message of the cross; the only place you find true wisdom. Worldly wisdom (“wise in the age”) exalts men and divides them into groups. God’s foolishness exalts the Redeemer and unifies all those who find their identity in Him.

^b 3:19 **For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS.”** This quotation comes from Job 5:13, a text where Eliphaz speaks eloquently to the way God reverses the fortunes of the proud (though he wrongly applies this to Job). The kind of wisdom that glorifies you will eventually bring you down.

^c 3:20 **“THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS.”** Paul takes these phrases from Psalm 94:11, inserting “of the wise” to make his point. This does not encourage us to stop thinking. It encourages us to stop thinking that our reasoning is our final authority. The wisdom and omniscience of God guarantees that He will always know better than the very best of brightest among His creatures.

^d 3:21 **So then let no one boast in men.** This is Paul’s (and God’s) solution to the party problem in church. Their error was not in having leaders but in elevating leaders to the place where no man belongs. People of great talent amaze us because we are wired by God to be amazed. Ours is to enjoy the benefits of those gifts, to thank those who share them with us and then to praise God for allowing people to have those gifts.

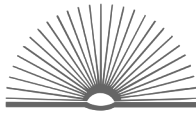
^e 3:21 **For all things belong to you.** So Paul does not diminish the value of church leaders. Instead he urges us to use them all. He illustrates that they are useful tools in our hands. They are ours because they belong to God like we do. For instance, as useful and versatile as a hammer is, you would never use it exclusively, singing its praises while criticizing wrenches and screwdrivers. They are all yours.

The Epistle of 1 Corinthians
Steven Svendsen, Sr.

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The unfolding of your words gives light.

Paul or Apollos or Cephas^a or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you^{b, 23} and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God^{c, d}.

^a 3:22 **whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas.** Faithful church leaders are gifts from God—even the leaders who get on your nerves. Rather than compare them you should thankfully observe how each one has been used to challenge you where you have most needed it.

^b 3:22 **or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you.** The application of this teaching extends beyond leaders. People with their identity wrapped up in God's good gifts enjoy a smorgasbord of resources for this life.

- If life is yours, you are not a passive victim. You have a stewardship to manage.
- If death is yours, you have an obligation to die in such a way that God is glorified. Let the world have its temporary glory. Give me hope in my death.
- If present things are yours, then every day can be viewed as an opportunity to be useful. This changes even the most unpleasant sunrises.
- If the future is yours, then you always have something to look forward to. You walk into the future knowing only that the future belongs to God and that you also belong to Him.

^c 3:23 **and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.** The Heidelberg Catechism, question one, asks and answers an important question:

Question 1. What is thy only comfort in life and death?

Answer: That I with body and soul, both in life and death, am not my own, but belong unto my faithful Saviour Jesus Christ; who, with his precious blood, has fully satisfied for all my sins, and delivered me from all the power of the devil; and so preserves me that without the will of my heavenly Father, not a hair can fall from my head; yea, that all things must be subservient to my salvation, and therefore, by his Holy Spirit, He also assures me of eternal life, and makes me sincerely willing and ready, henceforth, to live unto him.

Ownership makes a difference. Your life is not yours. This gives the whole idea of stewardship a vertical orientation. You are not managing some guy's gas station. You are responsible for what belongs to your Redeemer.

^d 3:18-23 God has given His people many gifts to use for His glory. Here are the basic ground rules for managing them:

1. Fight the urge to use God's gifts to make you look good. We do that by using theological knowledge to exalt ourselves or by seeking our identity in ministerial rock stars or Christian movements (charismatic, fundamentalist, Reformed, etc.). Better to embrace what makes you look foolish to the world (or the church) than to crave the world's praise.
2. Make use of as many Christian leaders as you can. You do not need to identify in every way with a servant to use him as a resource. God gave you your elders and He has given you others who have no authority over you but whom God uses to disciple you from a distance.
3. Life, death, the present and the future are gifts to be spent. Don't selfishly squander the days you have left in this world.

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