

**Text:** 1 Corinthians 3:18-23

**Coronavirus Sunday #3 – church closed**

**Title:** Repent of Worldly Wisdom

**Truth:** Worldly wisdom deceives its adherents from the true riches of Christ.

**Date/Location:** March 29, 2020 at FBC

## **Introduction**

We are going to go back to 1 Corinthians 3 this morning, notwithstanding the present circumstances of our nation and world. Some might complain that we need to talk about the coronavirus all the time and passages *directly* relevant to it or our response to it. That is because current events and the news cycle consume our minds. We are interested in pestilence and plague and everything the Bible has to say about it. True enough, the Scriptures mention in Luke 21:9-11 that there will be wars, earthquakes, famines, pestilences, and signs in heaven. These are the mere beginnings of birth pains, the Braxton Hicks contractions of a world that is pregnant for judgment. It is not the Tribulation yet—that time of world history with which the Olivet Discourse in Luke 21 is concerned. And God may be using this plague as a judgment against our wicked world. That’s His business and not mine. All of that is to say, we should not be surprised by this. Something seemingly is always going on in our world that could be interpreted as a “sign” of things to come.

But my friends, the word of God is always relevant, as we will see in 1 Corinthians 3. So let’s read 1 Corinthians 3:12-23 and remember where we have been and see where Paul takes us next.

### **I. Review of the previous verses, v. 12-17**

- A. The nature of the church is such that our participation in it should be in complete agreement with the foundation that has been laid—Jesus Christ. Anything out of accord with the holiness of Christ and His work is wood, hay, and straw. It will be burned up in the fiery evaluation at the judgment seat of Christ.
- B. God informs us that anyone who ruins the church will himself be ruined by God. Our Lord takes His work in church that seriously. The church is the residence of God’s Spirit in the present age. As such, it is a holy place. Bringing worldly wisdom, factions, envy, and strife into the church is totally inappropriate, completely defiling, and worth of divine judgment. People who split a church, who bring in false doctrine, or who undermine the church are endangering their very spiritual lives, besides damaging the church which God loves.

## II. To the Self-Deceived: Change Your Thinking! Verses 18-20

### A. Let no one deceive himself = Do not deceive yourself.

1. Self-deception operates inside the person. It is certainly connected to external factors, but the most important operation of it is inside the person. "Self-deception involves deception of the self, by the self, about the self, and for the sake of the self." See a very significant paper on this concept by Greg Bahnsen.<sup>1</sup>
2. The deception revolves around two notions. **First** is that the self-deceiver thinks himself to be wise. He has adopted worldly patterns of thinking, and thinks that they are the only patterns that make sense. He thinks anything else is foolishness. **Second**, he thinks that he can ruin his church with zero consequences. He comforts himself in the notion that he can freely defile the temple of the living God, disregard the holiness of His temple, and spite the Spirit who lives in the church.
3. Self-deception started in the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:4-6).
4. Self-deception is a strange thing to try to explain, but we know this much: it causes us to deny God's word and elevates human reason in order to achieve something that is desired. In the case of Eve, the thing desired was the lust for taste, beauty, and wisdom. She rationalized what was wrong by thinking about those things instead of what was right. What do you rationalize to get what you want? How do you deny God's word to get it?

**B. Let Him become a fool that he may become wise.** In plain language, Paul is saying that we must turn from human wisdom to God's wisdom. What seemed to be foolish to us before becomes wisdom after such a turning. The person who is godly has escaped a major part of self-deception (maybe not all of it, but most of it).

1. The person who embraces the philosophy of the world thinks he is wise but is deceived about his true standing. God's estimation of the unbelieving world is very dim. Their approach, ideals, values, are all foolishness.
2. Two quotations justify this statement: one from Job 5:13 and one from Psalm 94:11. No matter how clever the wise person is, God catches them in their own craftiness. Furthermore, God knows the thoughts

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.cmfnow.com/articles/pa207.htm>

of the “wise.” Think of that—God knows every one of your thoughts, and the thoughts of every non-Christian person who exists!

### III. To the Church: Don’t Boast in Humans. Verses 21-23

- A. Therefore, **let no one boast in men**. The conclusion of the previous reasoning about the futile thoughts of worldly “wisdom” is that we cannot be focusing on mere men—God’s servants, spiritual gardeners, church planters and builders. Creation and life are all of God, salvation is all of God; genuine church growth is all of God; the church is the holy temple of God. To focus on people—even *apostles* or *famous pastors*—is terribly foolish. They are like we are—fellow citizens and co-laborers in God’s church, preparing for God’s kingdom.
- B. When Paul says, **all things are yours**, you might wonder exactly what that means. He is speaking of the Corinthian believers’ inheritance as a Christian, as a person who is “in Christ.” He then lists those things that belong to them. Note: they belong to all believers in equal share.
1. Paul, Apollos, Peter. They consider themselves as “your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Cor. 4:5). Elevating them beyond that point is not loving to them, not true, and fails to recognize that the least in the kingdom of heaven will be even greater than John the Baptist. The privileged place we occupy as believers in the Messiah is due to blessings like Spirit baptism, a historical viewpoint from *after* the completion of the cross, and the additional revelation not available to Old Testament believers (Matt. 13:52).
  2. World. Paul moves from a few humans to the entire universe. This is a short way of saying that the meek will inherit the earth (Matthew 5:5). God destined His people to reign over the earth (Psalm 8:3-8, Hebrews 2:6-8). This was the plan from the beginning (Gen. 1:26-30), but sin temporarily ruined that prospect for Adam and Eve. God through Christ promises to restore it. Why would we get caught up in the little worldly things we have—or don’t have—when in just a short while “all will be ours”?? If we have enough to get by, we can be content, and joyful because we know what God has promised for the future. It is an inheritance richer than you can imagine.
  3. Life. Eternal life is the Christian’s possession *right now*. Even an interruption on our physical life caused by disease or accident can’t take away the fact that life is ours.
  4. Death. Your perception of the longevity of life is probably far different than you thought even a month ago. Think about at the turn of the

2020 new year. What we are going through now was not in any of our minds. The truth is that the risk of life was not truly more or less than it is now because our lives are in the hands of God. But what does that do to your thoughts about death, life after death, God, sin, and Jesus Christ? We are conquerors—actually more than conquerors!—over death and sin and the bondage of those present realities.

5. Things present, things to come. I grouped these because it seems that the Bible means “everything.” Granted, there are “things in the past” but those were things present at one time, so are embraced in this description. Nothing in this age can keep us from the inheritance that awaits those in Christ. Romans 8:37-39.

C. In turn, we belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. This speaks of the functional hierarchy between Father, Son, and believer. 1 Cor. 11:3. There is a vast ocean of difference between the essence of nature of the Father and Son on the one side of the ocean, and humanity on the other side. The ocean represents the creator-creature distinction that is so essential to properly understanding Biblical revelation. But setting that aside for the moment, Christ served the Father, and we serve Christ and the Father. Since we are all under the same head (Christ) and in turn under the same head (God the Father), there is no reason why we should not be united as one body!

## Conclusion

The mantra of some in face of deadly disease is, “our only hope is science.” No, my hope is in the Lord, who gave himself for me, and paid the price of all my sin at Calvary. God has graciously ordained to allow us use science to reduce human suffering and death for a time. But even that is only a temporary solution. Death is still on the agenda for each and every one of us. But if you belong to Christ, all things are yours. Worldly wisdom is useless and foolish. Consider instead:

Revelation 21:7 – those who overcome will inherit all things

1 Peter 1:4 – we await an inheritance that is incorruptible and undefiled and that doesn’t fade away. This is our hope friends, and today it STANDS despite all fear to the contrary.

Hebrews 9:15 – we will receive the promised eternal inheritance.

Heb. 6:12 – Imitate those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Keep on believing in Christ, friends. Don’t quit now.

Col. 3:24 – we know that we will receive the reward of the inheritance from the Lord.

Col. 1:12 – we are partakers of the inheritance of the saints who are in the light.

Eph. 1:18 - Do you know the riches of the glory of His inheritance?

Eph 1:14 the indwelling Spirit is the guarantee of our future inheritance.

MAP

If **life** is your highest value and most important aim, then the troubles we face are earth shattering. If **God** is your highest value and most important aim, then what we face is less important than the gospel.