**TITLE: GODLY WISDOM V WORLDLY WISDOM**

The Corinthians had been acting and thinking as mere human beings, not suitably discerning or applying the revealed words of God to their followership of Christ. Human Wisdom is foolish because it doesn’t perceive that’s its actions, opinions and perspectives should be assessed according to the thoughts and opinions of God (Psalm 50:21, Isaiah 55:8-9) thus it is demonstrated to be foolishness. On the other hand, God's approach is viewed as foolishness to the world, because it is of a contrary nature and end goal. To be truly wise we must gain access to the very thought process of God. (1 Cor 2:10-13). These thought processes have been revealed to us in words taught by the Holy Spirit. (1 Corin 13-16, 2 Tim 3:15, 2 Pet 3:15). Only when we abandon what seems wise by human standards, to accept without hesitation the divine viewpoint, as God has chosen to reveal in Scripture, can we claim true wisdom.

In most places in the New Testament, Wisdom is seen as the divine perspective available to and applied by believers to the issues of their lives. This is why Paul prayed that God would fill the Ephesians with “the spirit of wisdom and revelation” so they might grasp and experience the power available in Christ (Eph 1:17). And in Colossians 1, Paul yearned for the believers to be filled with the knowledge of ‘what God has willed’.

*Proverbs 9:10*

*The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.*

**KEY TEXT: 1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-23**

***V18 -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.***

**WISDOM**

It’s interesting to me that Paul uses the Greek words Sophia (wisdom) and Sophos (Wise) 28 times in this letter to the Corinthians and we’ve already seen him utilise most of those uses in chapter 1 and 2. This section in chapter 3 then, is the last slice of his ‘wisdom sandwich’ in this letter. Paul will hint three more times at wisdom in one way or another later, however this is the reiteration and conclusion of the strong argument he made back in chapter one, where he contrasts the so called ‘wisdom’ of the world and the actual and effective wisdom of God, as expressed through belief in and adherence to the full Gospel message.

Pastor Henry introduced us to this back in Week four of this term. Remember also how he highlighted the Greek word for foolish - as being Moria - from which we get the English word moron. Paul is invoking us to take seriously the call to rely on God and his revealed truths despite how moronic or foolish it makes us appear to the rest of the world.

**DECEPTION**

Paul begins this section by issuing a command: “Do not deceive yourselves”, By phrasing this verb in an imperative and by using the Greek word for “oneself” the apostle places any blame for being swept along with the wisdom of the world not on abstract circumstances but on an individual’s choice. No one can stand before God and claim that he or she was inadvertently swept along in the fast-flowing current of false wisdom. Rather, one chooses to follow either “the wisdom of this world” (v.19) or the wisdom of God. And each person must accept the consequences of the choice made.

Elsewhere in scripture we see similar invocations to be careful that we don’t deceive ourselves and even have a check on our motives and actions. Not forgetting the principle of sowing and reaping, we shouldn’t be surprised by some of the ‘hiccups’ we face, when we have lied to ourselves or dare, we say it, even the Holy Spirit (Acts 5:1-11), in following the flesh and professing it was for spiritual reasons.

*Galatians 6:3-5 -NIV*

***3****If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves.****4****Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else,****5****for each one should carry their own load.*

*Galatians 6:7-8 – NIV*

*Do not be deceived: God cannot be mocked. A man reaps what he sows.****8****Whoever sows to please their flesh, from the flesh will reap destruction; whoever sows to please the Spirit, from the Spirit will reap eternal life.*

I*saiah 5:20-21 - NIV*

*Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.****21****Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight.*

**THE PARADOX**

There seems to be a paradoxical phrase here, whereby we should become fools to become wise, much like the charge Jesus gave his disciples to lose their lives to gain them (Matt 16:25), or where he said that to be great we must serve (Matt 20:26) this is illustrative of the topsy-turvy nature of the kingdom of God, we should embrace these propound truths, knowing Christ the king came as a suffering Messiah and we are not greater than our teacher. Paul hints at him and the apostles also practising this principle in Ch 4:10.

***V19-20 - For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” 20and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”***

Paul backs up what he has been saying by quoting two texts from Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11. Although the first text is a quotation from Eliphaz (and is the only direct quote from Job in the NT), the sentiment Paul expresses—namely, that God knows what is going on in the world and that no one (here labelled “the wise”) can hide from God the shenanigans he or she is doing—is part of the common framework for all the characters in Job; in fact, it is a common theme in many places of the OT (e.g., Ps 139).

V21 -So let no one boast in men. For all things are yours,

From this, Paul concludes that no one should boast about any human being. As in v.18, this is put in the form of a command, which touches back on 1:29, 31, where the apostle also ruled out all boasting except for boasting in the Lord (see comments there). This, of course, hints at the precise problem: The Corinthians were boasting about allegiance to different human beings—Paul, Apollos, and Peter. But such boasting is futile. Why? Here Paul turns the slogans of the believers on their heads. Through their slogans they were claiming that they belonged to certain human individuals. (see also 1 Cor 4:6, Psalm 118:8-9, Psalm 146:3-5)

Paul, by contrast, insists that “all things” belong to them! The next two verses give a theological explanation of this statement.

***V22-23 -whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, 23and you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.***

**ALL THINGS ARE OURS**

It is probably best to work in reverse from the way Paul expresses himself here. The ultimate basis for Paul’s statement that “all things are yours” is the unwritten assumption stated in many parts of the OT but perhaps summarized best in Psalm 24:1: “The earth is the LORD’s and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it.” Everything in the world belongs to God, for he is its Creator. The next step is to realize that Christ belongs to God; he is God’s Son. By virtue of that fact, therefore, everything also belongs to Christ. But we belong to Christ; we are his people, and we live in him. Thus, by extension, everything belongs to us as we live in him.

The apostle is not content, however, simply to leave this principle in generalities; he goes on to state specifically some of the things that belong to us in Christ, who belongs to God: the world, life, death, things that are present, and things that are yet to come. Most of these things are obvious when we realize that Christ conquered death by the victory of his resurrection life. Since he is Lord, we can now have security about the present and the future (cf. Ro 8:38–39). And, yes, human beings belong to believers too—including Paul, Apollos, and Peter. The Corinthians are therefore short-changing themselves if they claim that they belong to Paul or Apollos or Peter. They are giving up their freedom in Christ and their ultimate possessions in Christ. They do not exist in order to serve the interests of some human leader. Rather, these human leaders, in Christ, are there to serve them—and the goal of all three of these leaders is the same: to make sure that believers see the abundant riches they have in Christ. In other words, Paul, and Apollos, rather than being champions of rival groups, have the same goal with the Corinthian believers—to serve their spiritual needs and to point out their wealth in Christ. (see also 2 Cor10:7, Gal 3:29)

**MEMORY VERSE**

So let no one boast in men, for all things are yours. – 1 Corinthians 3:21

**DISCUSSION QUESTIONS**

1. What are some of the subtle ways that as believers we can be deceiving ourselves, and trusting in human wisdom as opposed to Godly wisdom? (1 Cor 3:18)
2. In what ways can we as individuals or as a body be inadvertently and wrongly be glorying, boasting or even trusting in man? (1 Cor 3:21, Psalm 118:8-9, Psalm 146:3-5)
3. What are some of the implications of the statement Paul makes that ‘All things are yours’?

(1 Cor 3:21-23)

1. In what way do you sense the Lord is asking you to become a ‘fool’ for him? (1 Cor 3:18)
2. In what new way can you boast in the Lord this week? (1 Cor 1:31)
3. How do you understand what Paul was meant when he quoted from Job 5:23 and Psalm 94:11?

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