

“This World”

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

There is much in this world that the church has to deal with – much that will distract us from our task and discourage us in our work. These verses give us some of those distractions and guides us to know where to direct our attention so the distractions and discouragements don't cause us to fail in the task of building the kingdom of God.

I. THE DECEPTION OF WISDOM – VS. 18

A. This is dealing with humility

B. “Let no man deceive himself”

1. This being here indicates that there were some that were doing just that – deceiving themselves
2. The word “deceive” means to “deceive completely, beguile, seduce, meaning to lead out of the right way into error” (Zodhiates). The ones deceiving themselves were so completely deceived by their own pride that they could not see the error of their ways. This goes back to the “wood, hay, stubble” teaching that had no value.
3. “Let no man be puffed up with a vain conceit of his own wisdom, for this had been the real cause of all the evils which they had experienced.” (Barnes)

C. “If any man among you” – again, speaking primarily of the pastors and teachers in the church

D. "Seemeth to be wise in this world"

1. Seems to have a wisdom of not just spiritual things but of worldly things as well – looked upon as being an intelligent person
2. The word for "world" here is a different Greek word than in vs. 19 – here it is the word αἴων, which is often translated as "age," referring to the wisdom or knowledge of the world

May be regarded as mere intellectual knowledge, applied to secular and selfish ends; however vast and varied its attainments, it is worldly in the apostolic sense; it is "earthly," "sensual," "devilish," not like the "wisdom which is from above," which is "first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits." (Pulpit Commentary)

E. "Let him become a fool, that he may be wise" – a fool in relation to the wisdom of this age, and all that it holds, so that he can be wise in the things of the Spirit and of the Word

II. THE DISTRACTION OF WORLDLY PRAISE – VS. 19-20

A. This is dealing with pride, as opposed to humility

B. We see a truth restated here that was found in chapter one – "for the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God"

1. This word for "world" – kosmos – deals

with the world viewed objectively, as a whole

2. The wisdom that the world in general views as worthy of recognition and honor is viewed, in relation to eternal things, as foolishness to God – it has no value, of little worth

“Those who defile the church and think they can succeed in destroying it by their human wisdom, would be far better to reject that wisdom and accept the foolishness of Christ’s cross.” (MacArthur)

3. This “wisdom” is what inevitably leads to being so full of pride that the effect that a pastor, or a church, has in the community (their “world”) has no eternal value – it is “wood, hay, stubble”

C. The remainder of verse 19 and verse 20 are separate quotes from the Old Testament – the first from the book of Job and the other from Psalm 94

1. The first quote is from Job 5:13

[Job 5:13](#)

¹³ He taketh the wise in their own craftiness: and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong.

This “powerfully shows what the wisdom of this world is: it is a sort of craft, a subtle trade, which they carry on to wrong others and benefit themselves; and they have generally too much cunning to be caught by men; but God often overthrows them with their own devisings. Paganism raised up persecution against the Church of

Christ, in order to destroy it: this became the very means of quickly spreading it over the earth, and of destroying the whole pagan system. Thus the wise were taken in their own craftiness.” (Clarke)

2. The second (verse 20) is a quote from Psalm 94:11

Psalm 94:11

¹¹ The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they are vanity.

- a) The verse in 1 Corinthians quotes the Psalmist in a way that clarifies or qualifies what is meant by “the thoughts of man,” by changing it to “the thoughts of the wise” (a case of the Bible being its best own commentary)
- b) “As that by men is meant men of wisdom and knowledge, of the greatest capacities, whose thoughts, reasonings, schemes, and devices, the omniscient God not only knows, but makes known, and discovers them, sooner or later, to be vain and fruitless, yea, vanity itself” (Gill)

III. THE DIRECTION OF OUR GLORY – VS. 21-23

A. This text is dynamic and very specific in where our glory is NOT to be – not to be “in men”

B. The law of opposites is seen very clearly here – if it is NOT in men, then the only other option for our glory, as a believer, is in the Lord

1 Corinthians 1:31

(31) That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 10:17

(17) But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

C. "Therefore" – because God is greater than all the wisdom of men, and because even in the teacher's (and, by application, the believer's) comparative ignorance (as the world perceives it) is still wiser than all the world because of its eternal value

D. "Let no man glory in men" – specifically, the pastor/teacher is not to put his faith and "stock" in any particular man, even if they be of the caliber of the Apostle Paul or Apollos or Peter.

1. Our leadership, our direction, our oversight, when it comes to biblical things, is to be found anchored in the Word of God, as the Person of God teaches us.
2. This is demonstrating against the hierarchal structure in many denominational churches.

E. "For all things are yours" – vs. 22-23 explain this

1. The "all things," staying within the context of the letter so far, is speaking to the benefit that all those that the Lord had given them for spiritual leadership was, as well as the benefit of their teaching dealing with this life, and then the life that is to come
2. "Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas" – these are mentioned in 1:12, and Paul and Apollos again in 3:5-6 – instead of putting

our hope and faith in a particular teacher, we need to understand that those teachers were given for the benefit of the cause of Christ in the church

3. "Or the world" – compared to the "wisdom of this world" in verse 18-19 – the "wise" of this world may think they have far more than the believer does (or, specifically, the pastor/teacher, as is referenced here) but, in Christ, "the world (κόσμος)" – with all its wonder and beauty and amazement – is ours to benefit from, and to use for the advancement of the kingdom of God. We can appreciate it far more than the lost because we know who made it!!
4. "Or life" – physical life, to live – we have been given this life to both be blessed by and to be a blessing with

[Romans 8:37–39](#)

³⁷ Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

³⁸ For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come,

³⁹ Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

5. "Or death" – even in death, we have victory – because Christ conquered death so will we conquer death – we will "own" death, or power over death, as it were

[1 Corinthians 15:54–57](#)

⁵⁴ So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put

on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

⁵⁵ O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

⁵⁶ The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

⁵⁷ But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

6. "Things present" – literally, *to stand in sight* (Vincent) – things that are visibly, physically, around us – they have all been given to us in order to accomplish the will of God on earth
7. "Things to come" – the future, both while on earth, and, more specifically, in eternity (goes back to the issue of reward mentioned in verse 8 and 14)

1 Timothy 4:8

⁸ For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

8. "All are yours" – he "bookends" this text with the same phrase – "All things are yours" (vs. 21), and here
 - a) Everything that the pastor/teacher has in this life is his in order to build upon that firm foundation of Christ Jesus
 - b) And, the church is given gifted men, and spiritual gifts themselves, as well as simply "all things," in order to accomplish building the church of God

9. There is an aspect of blessing in these

verses – not only do we have all we need to accomplish the will of God on this earth, but we have simply been blessed with things in this life just because we are His children. Just as we, as parents, give gifts to our children simply because they are our children, so does our heavenly Father give good things to us.

1 Timothy 6:17

¹⁷ Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

Proverbs 10:22

²² The blessing of the LORD, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.

10. Verse 23 gives the reason why we have what we have – because we are “Christ’s; and Christ is God’s” – it is because we are joint-heirs with Him, as a child of God, that we have all we have in Christ

Romans 8:16–17

¹⁶ The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God:

¹⁷ And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

Conclusion: We face much today that will cause us to become discouraged in our walk with the Lord. As we get discouraged, we will take our attention off the right things, the things of the Lord, and put them on “this world.” When that happens, we become engrossed in trying to live the way the world wants us to, and the glory that belongs to the Lord will then

be directed to someone here. The outcome of that for the church will be destructive. It happened in the church at Corinth, it has happened down through the history of the church, and it is still happening today. We must stay focused on things of the Lord – something especially true of the spiritual leadership of the church.