

INTRODUCTION

1. Please take God's Word and turn with me to 1 Corinthians chapter 3.
2. We are looking today at verses 18-23.
3. Read 1 Corinthians 3:18-23.
4. In our last time together, we looked at the judgment of the believer's works and saw that every believer will either receive or lose rewards at the bema seat of Christ.
5. The question is how we build or "the quality of each man's work" (v.13).
6. If we are building on the proper foundation with the proper materials then at that time of testing our work will remain.

7. But if we use the wrong materials, it will burn up but we will be saved.
8. The issue is rewards not salvation.
9. The Corinthians were already saved.
10. Now as we look at verses 18-23, we see Paul calling for right thinking when it comes to ourselves, others, our possessions and our possessor, the Lord Jesus Christ.
11. These verses are key to helping us to eliminate division in the church.
12. If there is a breakdown in any of these 4 areas, division will rise.
13. The first is found in verses 18-20 where Paul first says in order to eliminate division, it's only going to happen...

LESSON

I. **By How We Think of Ourselves (vv.18-20)**

A. If You Do Not Think of Yourself Properly You Will Be Deceived (v.18)

Paul commands the Corinthians in verse 18 by saying, “Let no man deceive (pres.act.imp.) himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise.

1. It’s foolish to think of yourself in this way because of the dangers associated with it

What is associated with this kind of thinking?

Pride!

- a) Pride brings dishonor

Proverbs 11:2 (NASB) When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with

the humble is wisdom.

- b) Pride brings destruction
Proverbs 16:18 (NASB) Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.

2. It's also foolish because Scripture forbids it

- a) Isaiah 5:21 (NASB) Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and clever in their own sight!
- b) 1 Corinthians 8:2 (NASB) If anyone supposes that he knows anything, he has not yet known as he ought to know.
- c) Galatians 6:3 (NASB) For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.
- d) Proverbs 3:7 (NASB) Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and turn

away from evil.

B. God Views the Wisdom of this World as Foolish
(vv.19-20)

Paul asked in 1:20, “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?”

Paul says in our passage in verse 19, For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God.

1. It’s moronic when you compare it to God or to spiritual matters
2. He quotes from two OT passages: Job 5:13 and Psalm 94:11
3. Verse 19 and 20 continues, “For it is written, “He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness”; 20 and again, “The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are

useless.”

4. The Scriptures always stand true

Romans 3:3 says, “...Let God be found true, though every man be found a liar.”

5. Scripture is firm and fixed. Paul says “It is written”.

6. Men may deceive us but God “catches the wise in their craftiness” and they will not be able to escape His divine verdict.

7. God always knows the “reasonings of the wise” and they are always “useless”. (v.20)

The one who trusts in human understanding does not have the right understanding of himself. He does not see that his spiritual opinions, ideas, and **reasonings** are **useless** (*mataios*), vain and empty.

The proper view of ourselves, the godly and

true view, is that apart from divine truth we are fools with empty thoughts. Recognizing this truth opens the door to true wisdom and closes the door to division.¹

So if we are going to prevent or eliminate division in the church, it's first has to happen by how we think of ourselves.

Second, we can prevent or eliminate division...

II. By How We Think of Others (v.21a)

A. We Should Not Make Celebrities Out of Leaders Regardless of Who They Are

1. Paul never endorsed any of his fellow workers as celebrities but as servants for their sake

a) Paul ends 1 Corinthians mentioning the “household of Stephanas, that they were the first fruits of Achaia and that they

¹ MacArthur, John F., Jr. [1 Corinthians](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.

have devoted themselves for the ministry of the saints” (16:15).

- b) In Philippians 2:24 he mentions Epaphroditus as “my brother and fellow worker and fellow soldier, who is also your messenger and minister to my need.”
- c) He mentioned Epaphras in Colossians 1:7 as “our beloved fellow bond-servant, who is a faithful servant of Christ on our behalf.”
- d) Timothy is mentioned in Romans 16:21 as “my fellow worker.” In 1 Thessalonians 3:2 Paul refers to him as “our brother and God’s fellow worker in the gospel of Christ.”

2. We should respect and submit to godly leaders not make movements out of them

Hebrews 13:17 (NASB) Obey your leaders

and submit to them, for they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account. Let them do this with joy and not with grief, for this would be unprofitable for you.

This, of course, is referring to submitting to godly leaders!

B. Celebrityism Leads to Division

3 John 1:9 (NASB) I wrote something to the church; but Diotrephes, who loves to be first among them, does not accept what we say.

C. Our Boasting Should Not Be in Men But in the Lord

1. Paul says in verse 21 “so then let no one boast in men.”
2. Paul ended chapter one the same way by saying “Let him who boasts, boasts in the

Lord” (1:31).

We should rejoice in and profit from *all* the faithful leaders God sends us, **whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas.**

If the Corinthians had been careful to understand and follow what all three of those men *taught*, rather than, for instance, how they looked or spoke, the church would have been united, not divided. Their view of others had to be corrected.²

We prevent or eliminate division by how we think of ourselves and by how we think of others.

Verse 21b-22 gives another way we do this...

III. By How We Think of Our Possessions (vv.21b-22)

Paul says, “For all things belong to you, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things

² MacArthur, John F., Jr. [1 Corinthians](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.

belong to you.”

A. Everything from God is Ours

1. As believers we are “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17).
2. We have even inherited Christ’s glory, given to us by our Lord Himself - John 17:22 says, “The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one.”

B. The World or Life or Death or Things Present or Things to Come is Totally Inclusive

Paul begins and ends this declaration with all things belong to you (cf. 21*b*).

2 Corinthians 4:15 says “For all things are for your sakes, so that the grace which is spreading to more and more people may cause the giving of thanks to abound to the glory of God.”

1. The world (*kosmos*) is ours, even now

His main point is that, in the millennial kingdom and throughout eternity in the new heavens and new earth, we will possess the earth in a richer way (Matt. 5:5; Rev. 21). But even now the universe is a possession of God's people. It is ours. Our heavenly Father made it for us. It is still in the grip of the evil one (1 John 5:19), but it will someday and forever belong to us, not to him.

Joseph Parker reports an interesting story about his first pastorate: "I began my ministry in Banbury, and my upper window looked over the vast estate of a wealthy man. It was I, really, who inherited that estate. Oh, I did not own a foot of it, but it was all mine. The owner came down to see it once a year, but I walked its miles day after day."

When we fully inherit the world, with Jesus

on the throne, it will be perfect, and even more ours. In the meanwhile, this present world already belongs to us, with its wonders and glories, imperfections and disappointments.

The believer can appreciate the world as no unbeliever can. We know where it came from, why it was made, why we are on it, and what its final destiny will be. We can sing with certainty as well as joy, "This is my Father's world." And we are His heirs.

2. All life is ours; but from the context it is clear that Paul is primarily referring to spiritual life, eternal life.

In Christ we have new life, a quality of life that will never tarnish, diminish, or be lost.

God's own life is in us now. Through Christ, God abides in us (John 14:23), and we share His nature and His life (cf. 2 Pet.

1:3–4).

3. Even death is ours.

The great enemy of mankind has been overcome.

Christ has conquered death, and through Him we have conquered death (cf. 1 Cor. 15:54–57).

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 deliver him to Jesus.

It brings us into the eternal presence of our Savior.

That is why Paul could say with such joy, “For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain” (Phil. 1:21).

Whether he remained on earth for a while longer or went to be with the Lord, he could not lose.

For Christians, death can only make things better.

To stay here and finish the work Christ has given us to do may be “more necessary,” but “to depart and be with Christ ... is very much better” (Phil. 1:23–24).

For God’s people, this present life is good, but death—which ushers us into eternal life—is better.

4. Things present are ours.

That encompasses everything we have or experience in this life.

It is, in fact, a synonym for this life.

It includes the good and the bad, the

pleasant and the painful, the joys and the disappointments, the health and the sickness, the contentment and the grief.

In God's hands it all serves us and makes us spiritually richer.

Romans 8:37-39 says, "In all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us"; and because nothing "shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord," nothing can cause us any real harm.

God causes *all* things to be working together for our good (v. 28).

5. Things to come are ours

The reference here is not primarily, if at all, to the future of our present lives.

That is included under things present, meaning everything we will experience on

earth.

The things that are to come are heavenly blessings, of which we now have only a glimpse.

Yet they will be the greatest blessings of all.

These somewhat overlapping terms crisscross the reality that everything is for us to share equally as heirs of God's glories.

So why should we divide ourselves into factions? No man is the source of any of this inheritance, so there is no reason to "boast in men" (v. 21a).³

How we think of ourselves, others, and our possessions can prevent and eliminate division in the church but also the final thought....

IV. By How We Think of Jesus (v.23)

³ MacArthur, John F., Jr. [1 Corinthians](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.

Paul concludes by saying, “And you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.”

A. Jesus is the Source of Spiritual Unity

It is in taking our eyes off Him that division begins, and it is in putting our eyes back on Him that division ends.

“The one who joins himself to the Lord is one spirit with Him” (1 Cor. 6:17).

B. Believers All Belong to the Same Lord and Are One with Each Other

Therefore anything that denies our oneness with each other denies our oneness in Him (cf. Phil. 2:1–4).

The greatest possible motive for maintaining the unity of the Spirit and for avoiding church division is knowing that we belong to Christ and that Christ belongs to God. Because we all

belong to Him, we all belong to each other.

In His high priestly prayer, our Lord wonderfully enriches His teaching on unity. Speaking of believers, He says, “For they are Thine; and all things that are Mine are Thine, and Thine are Mine, ... that they all may be one; even as Thou, Father, art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be in Us, ... that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them, and Thou in Me, that they may be perfected in unity” (John 17:9–10, 21–23).

CONCLUSION

1. How can men who are so much one, be divided?
2. It begins with failure to understand the reality of our spiritual unity in the One who is our Possessor.
3. With a common Possessor and possessions, common leaders and teachers, and common dependence on Scripture, there should be no cause

for factions and disunity.⁴

4. Another cause of division is unbelief.
5. Unbelievers in the church cause division because they are NOT one with Christ or with believers.
6. If that marks you this morning, I would like to call you to repent and receive the forgiveness of sin that is found only in Jesus Christ.
7. Let's pray.

⁴ MacArthur, John F., Jr. [1 Corinthians](#). Chicago: Moody Press, 1984. Print. MacArthur New Testament Commentary.