

1 COR 3:18-23—RADICALLY COMMITTED TO CHRIST

INTRO: Has your worldview or mode of life ever been confronted or seriously challenged? If we're in the Middle East, ISIS will force you to make a choice. We're not in that situation, but the choices of daily living can be just as profound. Even if we grew up, got the degree we wanted, got a job in our field, are doing reasonably well and are reasonably happy, challenges to our fundamental belief system and manner of life happen frequently and in many different ways—some positive, some negative; some chosen, some forced upon us.

For example, you decide to get married. That will bring about a significant change in your life, even if you've been with the person for years. And the same is definitely true with having kids.

Or, I know a woman who was promoted to supervisor in her job, but is overwhelmed with work because she doesn't have the manpower and support she needs. So she's going to quit and she and her husband have bought an RV and are planning on driving around the country for at least a year (in his job, he's not tied to an office). She is going to be confronted with what she really wants to do with her life and probably will have her values and priorities significantly altered by the experience.

Many confrontations and challenges to our beliefs and lives are not pleasant; we're seriously injured in a car crash; our spouse or a child dies; the doctor says "you've got cancer"; you get laid off or fired; you find out your spouse has been cheating on you.

Particularly when really bad things happen, we are tempted to say, "Why me?" or "God, how could you let this happen?" (Most people don't say such things when *good* things happen to them.) A significant number of people abandon whatever faith in God they had when bad things happen to them—as if God's existence depends upon our having a good and easy life.

But the Bible tells us that good and bad are going to happen to everyone—pretty much equally, whether you're a Christian or not. As Jesus said, God "**causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous**" (Matt 5:45). So be prepared for it, and don't let your faith be shaken or collapse when bad things happen, because they will.

But the Bible goes beyond that. The Bible in general, and today's passage in particular—**1 Cor 3:18-23**—confronts and challenges us to be *intentional* in our lives—to *make a choice*—to know what we believe, why we believe it, and to base our whole lives on God in Christ—because that is the *only* way we will have the stability and security we need in the face of changing circumstances, and that's the *only* way to find the ultimate happiness and fulfillment we all want.

[READ 1 Cor 3:18-23].

PROP: Be radically committed to Christ—you're a fool if you're not.

O/S: This passage is arranged in the form of a logical argument: (1) v.18 says "**Don't deceive yourself: if you think you're wise in this world (smart, well-educated, have it all together), all that may be true, but if that's what you're basing your life on, you're a fool; instead, you need to become a particular kind of fool, and then you will be truly wise.**" vv. 19-20 flesh that out. Then (2) v. 21 says "**Don't boast in men,**" and vv. 21b-23 flesh that out.

So what I will do is look at both parts of Paul's argument, then consider the implications for us individually and corporately.

I. v. 18-19a [READ]

In many respects, this passage is summarizing everything Paul has said earlier in the book. Paul contrasts wisdom and foolishness. Specifically, Paul contrasts what are wise and foolish in the *world's* eyes with what are wise and foolish in *God's* eyes. Look at this:

- **1:18:** "The *word of the cross* is *foolishness* to those who are perishing."
- **1:19:** God says, "I will destroy the *wisdom of the wise.*"
- **1:20:** "Has not God made *foolish* the *wisdom of the world.*"
- **1:21:** "The *wisdom of the world* did *not* come to know God; God was well-pleased through the *foolishness of the message preached* to save those who believe."
- **1:23:** "We preach *Christ crucified*, to Jews a stumbling block and to Gentiles *foolishness.*"
- **1:24-25:** "*Christ* [is] the power of God and the *wisdom of God*, because the *foolishness of God* is *wiser than men.*"
- **1:27:** "God has chosen the *foolish* things of the world to *shame the wise.*"

Paul is saying again and again, the GOSPEL may be foolishness to men but it is the wisdom of God—so to base your life on *anything* other than the Gospel is the ultimate foolishness and will bring you to disaster.

That is exactly what Paul is repeating in 3:18-20. Paul is concerned about the unity and strength of the church. Corinth was the provincial capital of Greece and was one of the largest and most important cities in ancient Greece. It was a commercial and trading center. Corinth had a lot of talented people. If you were sharp and knew the ropes, you could make a lot of money. In many ways it was like the US today.

That is precisely why Paul is talking about what we base our lives on: because it is so easy to get sucked into thinking and living as if this is *all* there is; we don't even realize that our values, our priorities, our time, our money, our mindset—have been co-opted by the world's value system, and one day we will wake up and wonder 'How did I ever get here?' but we won't be able to change, and we'll be lost forever.

When Paul talks about God destroying the wisdom of the wise (1:19) or says “the reasonings of the wise are useless” in 3:19, he is not saying that you shouldn't get a good education, be smart in your business, use your brain, etc., etc. All that is necessary and important in their place. But what he is saying is: “Be aware. Life is passing by like this (SNAP!). All of these things are good things, but they are not *ultimate* things. But anything you turn into an ultimate thing—IOW the things of greatest importance in your life (it can be family, it can be money, it can be success, it can be looks, it can be popularity, it can be anything)—if it is not Jesus and the gospel then by definition it is an IDOL. You have become an idolater. And God looks at idolaters and calls them “fools.”

That's why Paul says in the first sentence of 3:19 (let me paraphrase): “If you are living for this world, for all it has to offer—if that is what is most important to you, if that is what you are basing your life on—you are a fool in the eyes of God.” Then in vv. 19-20 he paraphrases from Job 5:13 and Ps 94:11 to the effect that: “You think you're so smart? How's that going to work out for you on Judgment Day when you stand naked before God with nothing to say?” That leads to the second half of his argument in vv. 21-23, which is summarized in v. 21a:

II. v. 21a [READ]

Again, that is exactly what Paul had said at the end of ch. 1:

- 1:29, 31: “So that *no man may boast before God* . . . *Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord.*”

What he is saying is: “If the focus of our life is on this world and all it has to offer, then along with that we will be looking to people and the approval of people for our ultimate meaning and reason for being.” BUT people—just like money, power, sex, success, fame, or anything else—they are temporal, they are flawed, they are self-centered, they will not last. The world itself will not last; it will burn up.

He's arguing that because the world and the world's people are temporal, flawed, and primarily concerned about themselves, they inevitably will bring division. America today is a deeply divided nation, in large part because we have abandoned the transcendent unity that Christ brings. The same thing was happening in the church at Corinth. In both ch. 1 and ch. 3 Paul talked about how some were saying “I'm of Paul” or “I'm of Apollos,” or “I'm of Cephas.” Today, people say, “I don't like the pastor” or “I don't like the music” and leave a church—or churches divide—over fairly trivial reasons instead of people becoming an integral part of a body that they need and that needs them.

The world and its people cannot give us the stability and security we all need and the ultimate happiness and fulfillment we all want. Those things can *only* come through God in Christ, because only God is eternal; only God is omniscient; only God is omnipotent; only God is big enough; only God knows us inside-out better than we know ourselves; and only God in Christ is totally committed to our ultimate wellbeing—and he proved it on the cross. That's why Paul said earlier, the cross is foolishness to men but is “**the power of God and the wisdom of God.**”

In vv. 21b-23 Paul concludes his argument by saying [READ] Essentially he is saying: “Don't you see? If you base your life on the Gospel, on Christ, you *cannot* lose. *Everything* will belong to you. We will inherit a new heaven and a new earth. And it is GUARANTEED—because everything belongs to God, and if we belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God, then we belong to God. It's a logical argument like: “If A includes B and B includes C then A includes C.” So *nothing* can keep us from all that God has for us BECAUSE HE IS—GOD. That's why you're a fool to base your life on anything other than Christ. You're guaranteed to *lose* if you base your life on anything else, and you're guaranteed to *win* if you base your life on the Gospel. So what choice are you going to make?

That is why the ultimate answer for our life is that we need to be radically committed to God in Christ first and foremost. When I say “radically,” I mean it in its primary sense of going to the *root* of matters, because “radical” comes from the Latin word *Radix* which means “root.”

This passage is confronting us with a choice. It is asking us—no, it is *telling* us—to examine the *root* of our lives and get rooted in the only thing that will not destroy us but will fulfill us. This is not just theological but is eminently practical, because the root—what we base our lives on—affects and determines every aspect of our lives: our worldview, our values, our priorities, *how* we do our business, *how* we treat people, *how* we spend our time, *how* we spend our money. And there are only two options: we can be fools or we can be wise. There is no third choice. So let’s look at some of the implications for us individually and corporately.

III. Implications

A. Individually

This passage does speak to us individually. v. 18 says, “**Let no man deceive himself,**” and v. 21 says “**Let no one boast in men.**” Both of those are in the singular. So Paul is talking to you and he is talking to me as individuals.

I heard a story once, it may have been in a Tim Keller sermon, in which a college age girl, became a Christian. She told her parents that she wanted to go into the mission field. Now the parents first objected and pointed out all the problems of doing that. But when they saw that wasn’t getting anywhere, they changed their tactic. They said, “That’s OK if you want to do that, but first you should complete your education and get your masters degree.” The parents went to talk with her pastor, I think, and explained the situation, to get him to talk sense to their daughter.

The pastor said something like this: “We’re all hurtling through space on a little ball of rock. And even if we don’t collide with something, there will come a day when a trap door on this ball of rock will open, and we will fall into exactly *nothing*. What good will her masters degree be when that happens?”

There’s nothing wrong with masters degrees. I have one. But what that pastor was saying is: Is that what we are basing our life on? Is that what is most important to us? If it is, you’re a fool, because the world is going to end, the trap door will open, we will die. Fools are those who base their lives on the assumption that this world, this life, is all there is. Death ends everything. There is no eternity. There is no judgment.

But Paul is saying: that assumption is wrong. If—but ONLY if—we are in right relationship with God through Christ, IOW *only* if HE is most important to us, if our values, our priorities, what we do with our time, what we do with our money, are grounded in HIM and revolve around HIM, then when the trap door opens it will actually send us into an eternity in which everything belongs to us.

Can we honestly say that Christ is the most important person in our lives, our ultimate source of worth and value? We can say the words, but our lives will show it. Ask yourself, “How much money am I keeping for myself and how much am I giving to missions and to build the church and the kingdom?” For many people, money is where the rubber meets the road. For other people, they can give money and they use their giving as an excuse not to get involved with others, with the needy. Their *time* is where the rubber meets the road for them.

Some people draw the line at mentioning the name of Jesus. They say, “People will see Jesus by how I live, but I’m afraid to actually name his name.” If that is so, then what you *think* other people think of you is more important to you than Jesus. Jesus said in **Matt 10:32-33**, “**Everyone who confesses Me before men, I will also confess him before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, I will also deny him before My Father who is in heaven.**” All of us, in all of these areas and more, are being confronted and challenged to put our lives and our priorities on the only basis that will last, namely, get rooted in Jesus, first, last, and above everything else.

Paul is very honest: he is saying that others may think you are a fool. We don’t like to be called fools or thought of as fools. Nancy and I became believers in 1982. I remember a lady who was good friends with my folks telling us that we needed a “balance” in our life. IOW, Jesus is OK if he’s in his proper box, but don’t let him *radically* change your life.

But just remember something: for most people, a “radical” (at least in the sense of being thought of as a fanatic) is simply anyone willing to go one step further than you’re willing to go. That’s why we can’t let what we *think* other people think of us be the determining factor of our lives. We need to have what *Jesus* thinks of us be the determining factor of our lives. And I can tell you a secret: other people really aren’t thinking about you anyway—they’re thinking about themselves!

If we act differently than non-Christians, they may think we’re fools. But so what? It won’t matter because, as Paul said in **3:18**, “**we must become foolish [at least in the eyes of the world] so that we may become wise [in the eyes of God].**” Whose opinion do we value more?

What specific changes we need to make in our lives will differ because we’re all different. But whatever God is saying to you now—what to do with your money, what to do with your time, how to change things with your spouse or your kids—deal with it and make the changes.

B. Corporately

This passage also speaks to us corporately as a church, a body of believers. vv. 18, 21, 22, and 23 use the word “you,” and “you” is always in the plural. So he is talking about the church as well as us individually.

As I mentioned two weeks ago, 1 Cor 3 has come at an important time in the life of Community Church, since we are in the process of deciding how we are going to become more engaged with our community. How that will shake down, I do not know. But I think we all need to commit ourselves in at least three ways:

- First, we should be holding this entire process up in regular prayer. I must confess that, while I have prayed about this, my prayers have been more sporadic and less fervent than I think this process deserves.
- Second, if you have any new or additional information concerning your own inclinations or desires, or concerning something you think was not adequately addressed by either the inside or outside group—get that information to Wade and the elders. The power points of both groups are on the **“newsletter and sermon archives”** page of the website. The big meeting where these things will be discussed and decisions will be made is next Sunday the 14th right after church. Most churches never go through a congregation-wide evaluation process like this. So *participate*—be part of the meeting.
- Third, whatever decisions are made and whatever plan we come up with, commit to becoming involved. Some of us don't like to do anything other than maybe coming to a service on Sundays. But that's like keeping Jesus in a little box, the “church is a Sunday morning for an hour” box. Any *body*, including the church, is only healthy if all its members are active and engaged.

It is Jesus who founded the church. Since it is *his* church, since it is *his* body, and since the church is the public face of Jesus on this earth, how can we *not* be involved but just sit passively on the sidelines? We all have different talents and abilities, and if we put them to use, I think God has a great future for this body.

CONCL: Throughout the Bible we are confronted to choose. Joshua confronted the people of his day, **“Choose you this day whom you will serve, but as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Josh 24:15)**. Paul is confronting us today in very stark terms to do the same thing: to live intentional lives; to choose; to recognize that everything we do—how we spend our time, what we do with our money, how we interact or don't interact with people—is a choice that demonstrates what is really most important to us. And he is saying that being radically committed to Christ is the *only* ultimately wise way to live. Any other basis of life is the way of a fool. That's the way it is. Let's be wise.