

In Christ We Have It All

1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Introduction: In 1987 singing sensation Whitney Houston (1963-2012) released her hit “Didn’t We Almost Have It All.” It quickly shot to #1 on the Billboard Hot 100 and was nominated for a Grammy Song of the Year. Go to YouTube and you discover three different videos of the song have a combined 74 million views. Tragically the song is something of a commentary on Whitney Houston’s life and death. She, like many, had so much. But it is clear, she did not have it all.

Sadly, many strive in this life to have it all, to find it all, in what this world offers; only to find heartache, disappointment and regret at the end. The world promises but it fails to deliver. Thankfully, there is one who delivers all that He promises and even more. It is Christ and Him crucified (2:2).

Paul returns to themes he addressed in 1:10-2:9. There is a wisdom from the world and a wisdom from God. One leads to foolishness and spiritual death. The other leads to true wisdom and spiritual life. One will make promises it cannot keep. The other will give you more than you could ever hope or imagine!

The key that unlocks these final verses in 1 Cor. 3 is found in verse 21: “for everything is yours.” This is a wonderful and comprehensive promise because “[we] belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God” (v. 23). Therefore in light of

these wonderful truths, how should we then live? Paul provides three directives for our consideration.

I. Do not deceive yourself concerning what true wisdom is 3:18

Paul informs us in 3:5-17 that the church is God's field, building and temple. God cares about his church and will judge and destroy anyone who destroys that temple (v. 17). In light of that reality, Paul puts forth a command in v. 18 that functions as a hinge verse. It looks both backwards and forward. The command: "Let no one deceive himself." Be on guard against self-deception. *The Message* reads, "Don't fool yourself." Paul is concerned that the Corinthians, because they are acting like infants (3:1), were thinking more of themselves and their leaders than they should. They were adopting the mind of the world and not the mind of Christ (2:16). Paul pushes the point with what follows, "If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age, let him become [a second imperative] a fool so that he can become wise." Carson notes well that we must see that "the Almighty utterly reverses so many of the values cherished by the world. What the world judges wise, God dismisses as folly; what the world rejects as foolishness is nothing less than God's wisdom" (*The Cross and the Christian Ministry*, 84). Exhibit A: The cross of Christ! The world delights in power and might. God works in weakness and suffering. The wisdom of this world mocks the cross. The wisdom of God glories in the cross. Applied to the

ministry, God works through servants not superstars, through the nobodies not the somebodies (1:26-29). God operates in a great reversal of values and norms. This is true wisdom. Don't be deceived and led away from the wisdom of the cross. The crucified life is to accompany us all the days of our life (Mark 8:34). It is new eyes by which we see everything.

II. Remember God sees every action and knows every thought 3:19-20

Tom Schreiner writes, "If believers, then, are 'wise' during the present era, they are joining forces with those who deem the cross to be foolishness. They may think they are on the right side of history, but they are actually on the wrong side of history" (*1 Cor.*, TNTC, 95). What Schreiner refers to as this "present era," Paul calls "this age" (cf. 2:6-8) in verse 18 and "this world" in verse 19. Buying into the wisdom of this "present evil age" (Gal. 1:4) is evidence of being self-deceived. It is to fancy a wisdom that "is foolishness with God" (v. 19). To give his thesis Old Testament warrant Paul cites two Old Testament text. First, he references Job 5:13. Second, he references Psalm 94:11. God, Job says, turns the craftiness of the wise of this world back on them. Vaughn says, "the tricky measures of the wise become a net with which God captures them" (*1 Cor.*, BSC, 45). They think they are wise, boast of their wisdom, only to discover it is their demise and destruction. The psalmist citation carries Paul's argument one step further peering into the souls of the so-called wise,

“The Lord knows that the reasonings (*ESV*, “thoughts”) of the wise are futile.”

Both in their actions and thinking the wise of this age demonstrate their foolishness, especially in boasting about men and not God; especially in their idolization of leaders and persons of power. That such thinking could make its way into the churches is scandalous, shameful, maddening! Anthony Thiselton notes the appeal of Psalm 94:11 to the Corinthian dilemma, “Psalm 94 stresses that in spite of manipulative and corrupt leadership by those in authority (Ps. 94:5-7, 16) the ‘schemes’ of these human persons fail because their best ‘thinkers’ are fallible (Ps. 94:11)” (*1 Cor.*, NIGNT, 323). The plans of the wise of the world are foolish, empty, and infective. In the great and grand reversal, “God, by use of what men call foolishness, has set man free from sin, provided him righteousness and set him on the path to holiness” (Vaughn, 45).

God sees every action and knows every thought of every human being. If we desire to be wise in the eyes of God, we have to believe and live, think and act, in ways that this age, this world, see as foolish. However, I believe John Piper is right, “Human wisdom feeds pride and pride drives a person away from God” (“How Much Do You Own,” 3-13-88). Run the other way from worldly fads and ideologies. They will only let you down. In the end, you will have played the fool.

III. Enjoy every blessing of God because all things belong to you 3:21-23

Paul will now pick up a theme he laid down in a positive manner in 1:31, “Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord.” Now he says it negatively and with specificity, “So let no one boast [imperative] in human leaders” (v. 21). The context, of course, is the factionalism and party politics that was tearing the church apart. This secular, worldly way of acting was wrong for two important reasons as Carson well notes, “It is wrong because the focus is wrong; the concentration is on some human being and not on the Lord God...the second reason why it is wrong is to boast about some human leader or other is that it cuts you off from the wider heritage that is rightfully yours” (*The Cross and Christian Ministry*, 85-86). It is this latter error that Paul addresses in verses 21-23 beginning with a statement that is nothing less than breathtaking, “for everything is yours.” What an amazing statement of the blessings and wealth the believer has in Christ! God has made all things for our blessing, good, joy and pleasure. God does not bless us with one teacher but every teacher! He blesses us in life or death. He blesses us now and in the future! “Everything is yours!” (vv. 21-22). Now let’s get specific and see the eight snapshots Paul gives us in verses 22-23. The list, I believe, is selective not exhaustive; specifically tailored to address the particular issues plaguing the Corinthian church.

- 1) Paul is yours. Your father in the faith is yours. The great apostle to the Gentiles, the missionary extraordinaire, the author of 13 New Testament letters, he belongs to you; to all of us.
- 2) Apollos is yours. The Alexandrian prince of preachers is yours. With all his eloquence, rhetorical skills, brilliance and apologetical gifts, he belongs to you; to all of us.
- 3) Cephas is yours. Peter, the rock, one of the inner circle of Jesus is yours. His life and perspective coloring the gospel of Mark, his two epistles building up the church, his humanity and frailty, his powerful preaching and miraculous works, he belongs to you; to all of us.
- 4) The world is yours. Vaughn is correct in my judgment, “the term “world” is not used in its ethical sense [see v. 19], but it refers to the entirety of creation seen as the proper inheritance of the Christian” (p. 45). All of this Corinthians belongs to you; to all of us.
- 5) Life is yours. Every waking moment and every sleeping hour is yours. You do not belong to this life, it belongs to you. And because you belong to Jesus, “to live is Christ” (Phil 1:21). Life in Christ belongs to you; to all of us.
- 6) Death is yours. Paul says for the Christian, “to die is gain!” (Phil. 1:21). The sting of death is gone. The garden tomb is empty. Death has become

our servant to usher us into the presence of King Jesus! “To be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord” (2 Cor. 5:8). Death in Christ now belongs to you; to all of us.

- 7) The present is yours. All things are yours right now. Every moment and all that happens is in the hands of a loving Father who is using them to conform you more and more to the image of His Son (Rom. 8:29). The present, today, belongs to you; to all of us.
- 8) The future is yours. The future in Christ is not uncertain, scary, ominous, or nerve-racking. The one who holds my present also holds my future! And, I’ve read about the end and we win! There is a rider headed back on a White Horse! He is King of Kings and Lord of Lords and all things are under His control (Rev. 19:11-21). The future belongs to you; to all of us (see Rom. 8:35-39 for a comparable list).

Paul concludes by telling us all of these glorious realities are ours because we “belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God” (v. 23). Jesus is God’s Messiah, God’s Son (Matt. 3:17), God’s Word (John 1:1), God’s essence (Phil. 2:6), God’s image (Col. 1:15), God’s radiance (Heb. 1:3). And because we are Christ’s and Christ is God’s, we who are in Christ, are God’s too. Everything we have has the double stamp of the Son and the Father. Therefore, as Warren Wiersbe says so well, “How rich we are in Christ! If all things belong to all

believers, then why should there be competition and rivalry?” (*Be Wise*, 57).

Why indeed? Why indeed!

Conclusion: Fallen, sinful humanity tends to be afflicted with one of two great sicknesses. One is pride and the feeling of self-sufficiency, and the other is insecurity and the feeling of inferiority. Interestingly, both seek to heal their malady by boasting, either in themselves or others. Both are an evidence of self-deception which Paul warns us of in 3:18. Applied to Christ and him crucified, John Piper is right on target when he says, “one says [the self-sufficient], I don’t need a crucified Christ to help me. The other [the insecure] says a crucified Christ can’t help me. The one looks strong. The other looks weak. Both are demeaning to the grace of God” (“How Much Do You Own?” 3-13-88). At this point, the only real cure of these deadly illnesses, whichever one it is, is the grace of God found in Christ and him crucified. Grace will lead you to humility: I need help. Grace will lead you to the cross: there is help. Both will lead you to boast, not in yourself or any human person, but only in Christ. “All things are yours” in Christ. Be wise in the eyes of God, and look and boast only in Him.