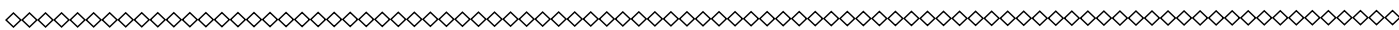




Pastor of the
International
Baptist Church
in Cologne Ger-
many.

Sermon Brief
Text: 1 Cor. 3:-1-23
Title: Spirituality & Wisdom
Lorin L. Cranford

Seeking to faith-
fully proclaim
the whole coun-
cil of God in
scripture!



INTRODUCTION

When is a church spiritual? Different answers to that question will emerge from different denominational traditions in our day. Almost none of these answers, however, is legitimate and reflects authentic biblical understanding of biblical spirituality. High emotional excitement in worship has nothing to do with spirituality. Certainly the so-called glossolalia has absolutely nothing to do with authentic spirituality. Usually it is connected to just the opposite. That certainly was the case at Corinth where some of the members practiced it and Paul labeled the church as unspiritual. Much of English speaking Christianity has falsely connected several meanings of the English word 'spirit' to one another.¹ Particularly false is the connection of the Holy Spirit to human emotions sometimes called 'spirit.' The Holy Spirit has no connection to our emotions. Creedal orthodoxy has nothing to do with spirituality.² Being able to say "Gowd" a certain way has no connection to spirituality. Always wearing a plastic smile and exhibiting a certain kind of pietistic demeanor has nothing to do with spirituality. Not going to movies and girls going without makeup and always with their heads covered at church has nothing to do with true spirituality. All of these and many more that could



be mention represent 'man-made' concepts of spirituality that have little or no connection to biblical principles of spirituality. Yet, they have been read back into scripture through false interpretation of texts in order to give them supposed legitimacy.

What then is true spirituality as taught in scripture? The New Testament has a lot to say about this topic, and over the coming months we will explore most all of these insights. But one of them, I want us to examine this morning is Paul's word to the Corinthians in 1 Cor. 3:1-21. Turn with me to this passage and follow along as I read the scripture text:

¹Marriam-Webster online definition: spirit Function: noun; Etymology: Middle English, from Anglo-French or Latin; Anglo-French, *esprit*, *spirit*, from Latin *spiritus*, literally, breath, from *spirare* to blow, breathe; Date: 13th century

1: an animating or vital principle held to give life to physical organisms

2: a supernatural being or essence: as capitalized : Holy spirit

b: soul 2a

c: an often malevolent being that is bodiless but can become visible ;

specifically : ghost 2 d: a malevolent being that enters and possesses a human being

3: temper or disposition of mind or outlook especially when vigorous or animated <in high spirits>

4: the immaterial intelligent or sentient part of a person

5 a: the activating or essential principle influencing a person <acted in a spirit of helpfulness> b: an inclination, impulse, or tendency of a specified kind : mood

6 a: a special attitude or frame of mind <the money-making spirit was for a time driven back — J. A. Froude> b: the feeling, quality, or disposition characterizing something <undertaken in a spirit of fun>

7: a lively or brisk quality in a person or a person's actions

8: a person having a character or disposition of a specified nature

9: a mental disposition characterized by firmness or assertiveness <denied the charge with spirit>

10 a: distillate 1: as (1): the liquid containing ethanol and water that is distilled from an alcoholic liquid or mash —often used in plural (2): any of various volatile liquids obtained by distillation or cracking (as of petroleum, shale, or wood) —often used in plural b: a usually volatile organic solvent (as an alcohol, ester, or hydrocarbon)

11 a: prevailing tone or tendency <spirit of the age> b: general intent or real meaning <spirit of the law>

12: an alcoholic solution of a volatile substance <spirit of camphor>

13: enthusiastic loyalty <school spirit>

14: capitalized Christian Science : god 1b

²See my university lecture "*Frömmigkeit in den urchristlichen Gemeinden*" with the English translation "*Piety in Primitive Christianity*" at cranfordville.com under Lectures.

1 And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? 4 For when one says, "I belong to Paul," and another, "I belong to Apollos," are you not merely human? 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. 9 For we are God's servants, working together; you are God's field, God's building.

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — 13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. 14 If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." 21 So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.³

In our text, Paul is addressing some serious problems that he had learned about from the household of Chloe (cf. 1:11) and that were present among the various house-church groups scattered over the ancient city of Corinth. Chapters one through four largely center on the existence of divisions in the church largely driven by a false understanding of spirituality and wisdom. He began this discussion with a call to end the factions in the church (1:10-11): "Now I appeal to you, brothers and sisters, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you be in agreement and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be united in the same mind and the same purpose. For it has been reported to me by Chloe's people that there are quarrels among you, my brothers and sisters."⁴

³3.1 Κάγω, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἠδυνήθην λαλήσαι ὑμῖν ὡς πνευματικοῖς ἀλλ' ὡς σαρκίνοις, ὡς νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ. 3.2 γάλα ὑμᾶς ἐπότισα, οὐ βρῶμα, οὐπω γὰρ ἐδύνασθε. ἀλλ' οὐδὲ ἔτι νῦν δύνασθε, 3.3 ἔτι γὰρ σαρκικοί ἐστε. ὅπου γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν ζήλος καὶ ἔρις, οὐχὶ σαρκικοί ἐστε καὶ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον περιπατεῖτε; 3.4 ὅταν γὰρ λέγη τις, Ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, ἕτερος δέ, Ἐγὼ Ἀπολλῶ, οὐκ ἄνθρωποι ἐστε; 3.5 τί οὖν ἐστὶν Ἀπολλῶς; τί δέ ἐστιν Παῦλος; διάκονοι δι' ὧν ἐπιστεύσατε, καὶ ἐκάστῳ ὡς ὁ κύριός ἔδωκεν. 3.6 ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, Ἀπολλῶς ἐπότισεν, ἀλλὰ ὁ θεὸς ἤξανε· 3.7 ὥστε οὔτε ὁ φυτεύων ἐστὶν τι οὔτε ὁ ποτίζων ἀλλ' ὁ αὐξάνων θεός. 3.8 ὁ φυτεύων δὲ καὶ ὁ ποτίζων ἓν εἰσιν, ἕκαστος δὲ τὸν ἴδιον μισθὸν λήμψεται κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον· 3.9 θεοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομὴ ἐστε.

3.10 Κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι ὡς σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων θεμέλιον ἔθηκα, ἄλλος δὲ ἐποικοδομεῖ. ἕκαστος δὲ βλεπέτω πῶς ἐποικοδομεῖ. 3.11 θεμέλιον γὰρ ἄλλον οὐδεὶς δύναται θεῖναι παρὰ τὸν κείμενον, ὅς ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς Χριστός. 3.12 εἰ δέ τις ἐποικοδομεῖ ἐπὶ τὸν θεμέλιον χρυσόν, ἄργυρον, λίθου τιμίου, ξύλα, χόρτον, καλάμην, 3.13 ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον φανερόν γενήσεται, ἢ γὰρ ἡμέρα δηλώσει, ὅτι ἐν πυρὶ ἀποκαλύπτεται· καὶ ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον ὁποῖόν ἐστιν τὸ πῦρ [αὐτὸ] δοκιμάσει. 3.14 εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον μενεῖ ὃ ἐποικοδόμησεν, μισθὸν λήμψεται· 3.15 εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον κατακαήσεται, ζημιωθήσεται, αὐτὸς δὲ σωθήσεται, οὕτως δὲ ὡς διὰ πυρός. 3.16 οὐκ οἶδατε ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν; 3.17 εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φθείρει, φθερεῖ τοῦτον ὁ θεός· ὁ γὰρ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιός ἐστιν, οἵτινες ἐστε ὑμεῖς.

3.18 Μηδεὶς ἐαυτὸν ἐξαπατάτω· εἴ τις δοκεῖ σοφὸς εἶναι ἐν ὑμῖν ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, μωρὸς γενέσθω, ἵνα γένηται σοφός. 3.19 ἢ γὰρ σοφία τοῦ κόσμου τούτου μωρία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ ἐστίν. γέγραπται γάρ, Ὁ δρασοῦμενος τοὺς σοφοὺς ἐν τῇ παιουργίᾳ αὐτῶν·

3.20 καὶ πάλιν,

Κύριος γινώσκει τοὺς διαλογισμοὺς τῶν σοφῶν
ὅτι εἰσὶν μάταιοι.

3.21 ὥστε μηδεὶς καυχάσθω ἐν ἀνθρώποις· πάντα γὰρ ὑμῶν ἐστίν, 3.22 εἴτε Παῦλος εἴτε Ἀπολλῶς εἴτε Κηφᾶς, εἴτε κόσμος εἴτε ζωὴ εἴτε θάνατος, εἴτε ἐνεστῶτα εἴτε μέλλοντα· πάντα ὑμῶν, 3.23 ὑμεῖς δὲ Χριστοῦ, Χριστὸς δὲ θεοῦ.

⁴*Παρακαλῶ δὲ ὑμᾶς, ἀδελφοί, διὰ τοῦ ὀνόματός τοῦ κυρίου ἡμῶν Ἰησοῦ Χριστοῦ, ἵνα τὸ αὐτὸ λέγητε πάντες καὶ μὴ ἦ ἐν ὑμῖν σχίσματα, ἦτε δὲ κατηρτισμένοι ἐν τῷ αὐτῷ νοῦ καὶ ἐν τῇ αὐτῇ γνώμῃ. ἐδηλώθη γὰρ μοι περὶ ὑμῶν, ἀδελφοί μου, ὑπὸ τῶν Χλόη ὅτι ἔριδες ἐν ὑμῖν εἰσιν.*

The church was enamored with sophisticated rhetoric from Greek training, evidently displayed in the preaching style of Apollos. Greek wisdom placed great emphasis on highly skilled communication through the use of eloquent rhetoric. Particularly strong was the teaching of the Sophist philosophers who traveled the countryside spreading the phoney wisdom as a money making scheme. Paul deliberately disavows this approach to preaching the gospel in 2:1-13. A large segment of the church was hypnotized by this Greek rhetoric and thought Greek wisdom was the key to becoming truly spiritual before God. In other words, Apollos wowed them with his preaching. And they drew false conclusions from it. Others in the church held up Peter as their hero. A few took a super elitist stance by proclaiming Christ as their preacher hero. Paul condemns all of this as sphere nonsense and a reflection of an utter lack of genuine spirituality. And thus he begins the discussion on chapter three with the rather shocking words, “And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ.” He then proceeds to talk about the role of preachers in the church, as well as the spiritual status of the church.

What can we learn from this? I think this text has something vitally important to say to us. Our aspiration as a church is to become authentically spiritual. But before we can do that, we have to know what true spirituality is. The false and deceptive definitions floating around in our world today will only delude us into thinking that we’re spiritual if we do this or that, or if we adopt certain worship practices etc. And we then will fall into the same self deception that plagued the Corinthian Christians.

Plus, in order to become genuinely spiritual, we are going to have to do some growing, real spiritual growing. Our immediate past history reflects a huge lack of spirituality and spiritual maturity. The more I learn about the entire history of the church, the more I’m convinced that the church has never been a deeply spiritual congregation. That lack of true spiritual depth has played a significant role in the perpetual instability of this church.

As your pastor, I passionately want us to move past that to a bright new day of authentic spirituality. And from the comments of many of you, I believe this is what you deeply desire as well. In this way the IBC church Cologne can become a bright, stable witness to the gospel of Christ in our city.

So let’s see what Paul can teach us from this text.

BODY

I. Slaves in God’s vineyard, vv. 1-9

1 And so, brothers and sisters, I could not speak to you as spiritual people, but rather as people of the flesh, as infants in Christ. 2 I fed you with milk, not solid food, for you were not ready for solid food. Even now you are still not ready, 3 for you are still of the flesh. For as long as there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not of the flesh, and behaving according to human inclinations? 4 For when one says, “I belong to Paul,” and another, “I belong to Apollos,” are you not merely human? 5 What then is Apollos? What is Paul? Servants through whom you came to believe, as the Lord assigned to each. 6 I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the growth. 7 So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth. 8 The one who plants and the one who waters have a common purpose, and each will receive wages according to the labor of each. 9 For we are God’s servants, working together; you are God’s field, God’s building.

3.1 Κάγω, ἀδελφοί, οὐκ ἠδυνήθην λαλήσαι ὑμῖν ὡς πνευματικοῖς ἀλλ’ ὡς σαρκίνοις, ὡς νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ. 3.2 γάλα ὑμᾶς ἐπότισα, οὐ βρῶμα, οὐπω γὰρ ἐδύνασθε. ἀλλ’ οὐδὲ ἔτι νῦν δύνασθε, 3.3 ἔτι γὰρ σαρκικοί ἐστε. ὅπου γὰρ ἐν ὑμῖν ζῆλος καὶ ἔρις, οὐχὶ σαρκικοί ἐστε καὶ κατὰ ἄνθρωπον περιπατεῖτε; 3.4 ὅταν γὰρ λέγη τις, Ἐγὼ μὲν εἰμι Παύλου, ἕτερος δέ, Ἐγὼ Ἀπολλῶ, οὐκ ἄνθρωποι ἐστε; 3.5 τί οὖν ἐστὶν Ἀπολλῶς; τί δέ ἐστὶν Παῦλος; διάκονοι δι’ ᾧ ἐπίστεύσατε, καὶ ἐκάστῳ ὡς ὁ κύριος ἔδωκεν. 3.6 ἐγὼ ἐφύτευσα, Ἀπολλῶς ἐπότισεν, ἀλλὰ ὁ θεὸς ἠΐξανε· 3.7 ὥστε οὔτε ὁ φυτεύων ἐστὶν τι οὔτε ὁ ποτίζων ἀλλ’ ὁ αὐξάνων θεός. 3.8 ὁ φυτεύων δὲ καὶ ὁ ποτίζων ἐν εἰσιν, ἕκαστος δὲ τὸν ἴδιον μισθὸν λήμψεται κατὰ τὸν ἴδιον κόπον· 3.9 θεοῦ γὰρ ἐσμεν συνεργοί, θεοῦ γεώργιον, θεοῦ οἰκοδομὴ ἐστε.

The first picture in verses one through nine that Paul draws is that of slaves (διάκονοι) working the vineyards of a Roman aristocrat. He pictures Apollos and himself as two of those slaves. The vineyard is the church and belongs to God alone.

Notice how he develops this picture. The picture is drawn this way so that the apostle can speak to them at the infantile level, since still after a few years from their conversion they are so spiritually immature that he has to continue feeding them ‘milk’ (γάλα) rather than ‘solid food’ (βρῶμα). He strongly feels that by now the Corinthians should have become spiritually mature enough in order to be fed the ‘solid food’ from the Gospel, but they aren’t ready yet for that level of teaching. Their spiritual status Paul describes not as πνευματικοῖς (spiritual) but as σαρκίνοις (fleshly), and as νηπίοις ἐν Χριστῷ (infants in Christ). These Corinthians with all their assumed spirituality Paul flat out declares to be acting like lost people, not like real Christians. By ‘fleshly’ Paul expounds by indicating that their jealousy and strife (ζῆλος καὶ ἔρις) mark out their pitiful status. They are acting “merely human” (οὐκ ἄνθρωποι ἐστε;).

What were they doing? The Corinthians took the standards of their own cultural and world as proper

measuring instruments of spirituality and correct teaching. Apollos' use of polish Greek rhetoric in preaching unwittingly opened the door to legitimize these false standards. There is no indication that Apollos intentionally tried to create disunity when he followed the apostle Paul at Corinth (cf. Acts 19:1). In fact, when Apollos learned what had happened he was unwilling to return to Corinth in spite of Paul's encouragement of him to do so (cf. 16:12).

It's always difficult but absolutely necessary for us to use God's standards of measuring things, and not those standards that come out of our culture and environment. The Corinthians failed to do this and created a mess in their church. Spirituality became a pompous display of highly charged emotional worship that scared off non-believers (14:23). At the same time, immorality ran rampant among the members. One man was living in sexual relationships with his birth mother (5:1-8). Men, particularly married men, in the church continue frequenting the brothels (6:12-20). Spirituality was to the Corinthians outward rituals focused on worship. Whatever preacher could use flowery words with clever catch phrases was their preacher. And thus the Corinthians completely missed the boat! Without realizing it, they were little more spiritual than their pagan neighbors, even though many of them had been Christians for several years. How sad! What a wasted opportunity.

And yet how often is the situation very similar in churches of our day. How genuinely spiritual are churches in our time? If you measure with these man-made standards, some of the churches get high marks. They have super charged worship with lots of noise. And preachers who look like runway models who are smooth talkers par excellence! But when God's standards of spirituality are applied, the paganism of these churches is exposed in the most repugnant ways. The churches languish in spiritual infancy even though they've been in existence for decades.

Paul sees the church here as a vineyard that needs lots of work and care. Both he and Apollos worked the vineyard at Corinth planting and watering (v. 6). But credit for any success with the vineyard belonged entirely to God since He was the one who produced the growth, that is, any spiritual development that had taken place. People, spiritual growth needs the proper teaching of God's Word. And God brings spiritual leaders to the church for that very purpose. Paul believed that both he and Apollos -- each in their own distinctive ways -- had faithfully taught God's truth to the Corinthians. They had 'tended God's vineyard' as God's fellow workers (θεοῦ συνεργοί) and 'farmers' (θεοῦ γεώργον). God would bless them for their labors.

But spiritual growth depended solely on God. People we can't make our church become spiritual. We can't. Worship won't make it spiritual. Prayer won't make it spiritual. Even ministry won't make the church spiritual. Nothing we do ourselves will make the church spiritual. God -- and God alone -- can make our church spiritual.

And He can do this only when we are completely open to Him to take control of our lives and when we are willing to let Him 'run the show' completely. Spiritual growth comes only when God is free to work in the lives of the believers in the church, that is, in your life and mine. Spirituality means spiritual development, spiritual growth. That Paul is clear about here. When Christ likeness begins taking shape in our lives, that's when spirituality is active in us. When the fruit of the Spirit that Paul talks about in Gal. 5:22-23⁵ starts surfacing, that's when we begin growing spiritually. This is true spirituality, because it comes from God. Not some trumped up man-made counterfeit spirituality.

I want the true thing for our church. God help us to never be content with man-made spirituality.

II. Construction workers in God's temple, vv. 10-17

10 According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; that foundation is Jesus Christ. 12 Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw — 13 the work of each builder will become visible, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each has done. 14 If what has been built on the foundation survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If the work is burned up, the builder will suffer loss; the builder will be saved, but only as through fire. 16 Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that

⁵By contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control."



"Neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth." — 1 Cor. iii. 7.

person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple.

3.10 Κατὰ τὴν χάριν τοῦ θεοῦ τὴν δοθεῖσάν μοι ὡς σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων θεμέλιον ἔθηκα, ἄλλος δὲ ἐποικοδομεῖ. ἕκαστος δὲ βλεπέτω πῶς ἐποικοδομεῖ. 3.11 θεμέλιον γὰρ ἄλλον οὐδεὶς δύναται θεῖναι παρὰ τὸν κείμενον, ὅς ἐστιν Ἰησοῦς Χριστὸς. 3.12 εἰ δέ τις ἐποικοδομεῖ ἐπὶ τὸν θεμέλιον χρυσόν, ἄργυρον, λίθου τιμίου, ξύλα, χόρτον, καλάμην, 3.13 ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον φανερόν γενήσεται, ἡ γὰρ ἡμέρα δηλώσει, ὅτι ἐν πυρὶ ἀποκαλύπτεται· καὶ ἐκάστου τὸ ἔργον ὁποῖόν ἐστιν τὸ πῦρ [αὐτὸ] δοκιμάσει. 3.14 εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον μενεῖ ὁ ἐποικοδόμησεν, μισθὸν λήμψεται· 3.15 εἴ τις τὸ ἔργον κατακαήσεται, ζημιωθήσεται, αὐτὸς δὲ σωθήσεται, οὕτως δὲ ὡς διὰ πυρός. 3.16 οὐκ οἴδατε ὅτι ναὸς θεοῦ ἐστε καὶ τὸ πνεῦμα τοῦ θεοῦ οἰκεῖ ἐν ὑμῖν; 3.17 εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φθείρει, φθερεῖ τοῦτον ὁ θεός· ὁ γὰρ ναὸς τοῦ θεοῦ ἅγιός ἐστιν, οἳτινές ἐστε ὑμεῖς.

With the second image in verses ten through seventeen, Paul turns to the building industry. Serving a church is like being the chief designer (σοφὸς ἀρχιτέκτων) and construction supervisor of a massive construction project. What is this huge building under construction? Not until verse sixteen does Paul reveal that it is nothing less than God's temple! Paul speaks of his initial ministry at Corinth, described by Luke in Acts 18, as laying the foundation of this temple. He declares that Jesus Christ is the exclusive foundation for temple construction! Apollos and others from the outside, along with the Corinthians themselves, were building the temple on this foundation.



The first point that Paul makes is the accountability of the builders to God; notice verses 10-15. Using building construction terminology, Paul describes two approaches to temple construction. The temple can be built with cheap, sub-standard materials. Or, it can be built with high quality materials. But 'inspection day' is coming when the owner of the temple will test the building to see whether it was built properly or not. What parts weren't correctly built will be destroyed; only the correctly constructed parts will survive the 'test by fire.' The builders then will be 'graded' on the basis of the quality of their work. Correct construction brings God's blessings and affirmation. Improper construction brings embarrassment and "loss" to the builder. In fact the builder may himself just barely survive 'inspection day.' He will see a lifetime of 'construction work' go up in flames however.

What is 'inspection day'? Quite clearly it is Judgment Day in which every believer must face divine scrutiny of his or her Christian life by God himself. Later in his second letter, Paul would frame this same idea with different words even more foreboding in 2 Cor. 5:10-11:

For all of us must appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each may receive recompense for what has been done in the body, whether good or evil. Therefore, knowing the fear of the Lord, we try to persuade others; but we ourselves are well known to God, and I hope that we are also well known to your consciences.

Every one of us here this afternoon is going to face Almighty God in final judgment. What we have done with Jesus in acceptance or rejection of Him will determine our eternal destiny. But for believers this judgment will also totally scrutinize how we have lived out our faith commitment to Christ from the moment of conversion to the end of our earthly journey. Jesus himself stressed the thoroughness of this divine judgement in Matt. 12:36-37 with this declaration:

I tell you, on the day of judgment you will have to give an account for every careless word you utter; for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned."

Just how deeply will our lives be examined? Jesus asserted that it will extend down to "every careless word you utter" (πάν ῥῆμα ἀργὸν ὃ λαλήσουσιν οἱ ἄνθρωποι)! In this public judgment of us as we stand before Christ's judgment seat, God will carry us through every word we have ever spoken, along with every action we have ever done. All of it will be exposed for everyone to see. The imagery of divine judgment is not a private session with God. No, not at all. Divine judgment is public and open for all the saints of God and all the angels of Heaven to observe.

Thus 'inspection day' is coming! We can't avoid it! We had better get ready for it!

In verses sixteen and seventeen, Paul applies his construction metaphor to the Corinthians: "Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person. For God's temple is holy, and you are that temple." The entire Corinthian church is God's temple. But each church member is also God's temple.⁶ This because the temple is a living, dynamic spiritual reality

⁶See also the following:

1 Cor. 6:19: "Or do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God, and that you are not your own?"

2 Cor. 6:16: "What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people."

Eph. 2:19-22: "So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also mem-
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rather than a church building made of wood, concrete etc. It is the same for us today. The IBC church is God's temple, and each of us as members are also God's temple. Paul defines temple with the Greek word ναός (naos). This word stresses temple as a shrine, as a place to worship God, over against the more inclusive word for temple ἱερόν, which stressed the entire temple complex in Jerusalem. Temple is but a metaphor for God's dwelling place on earth today. The implications of Paul's word choice here are substantial. We as a church and we individually exist to worship God, to magnify Him and to glorify Him. And Him alone. No place for show boating exists in God's house! There are no 'stars' performing in God's house. Everything done in the church must be solely to God and for God. The same thing is true in our individual life as well.

Note how important the temple is to God. Whoever causes damage and ruin to God's temple (εἴ τις τὸν ναὸν τοῦ θεοῦ φθείρει) will himself be destroyed (φθερεῖ τοῦτον ὁ θεός). God's temple is sacred and holy. Just as the Lord did not tolerate contamination of the temple in Jerusalem, He does not tolerate the contamination of His temple, the church, today. Any preacher who messes up God's church will face a horrible accounting before God. Any church member contributing to the downfall of God's church will face an angry God in final judgment. Hear what God is saying here, people!

III. Wise sages in this world, vv. 18-21

18 Do not deceive yourselves. If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, "He catches the wise in their craftiness," 20 and again, "The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile." 21 So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

3.18 Μηδεὶς ἑαυτὸν ἐξαπατάτω· εἴ τις δοκεῖ σοφὸς εἶναι ἐν ὑμῖν ἐν τῷ αἰῶνι τούτῳ, μωρὸς γενέσθω, ἵνα γένηται σοφός. 3.19 ἡ γὰρ σοφία τοῦ κόσμου τούτου μωρία παρὰ τῷ θεῷ ἐστίν. γέγραπται γάρ, Ὁ δρασσομένης τοὺς σοφοὺς ἐν τῇ πανουργίᾳ αὐτῶν·

3.20 καὶ πάλιν,

Κύριος γινώσκει τοὺς διαλογισμοὺς τῶν σοφῶν ὅτι εἰσὶν μάταιοι.

3.21 ὥστε μηδεὶς καυχάσθω ἐν ἀνθρώποις· πάντα γὰρ ὑμῶν ἐστίν, 3.22 εἴτε Παῦλος εἴτε Ἀπολλῶς εἴτε Κηφᾶς, εἴτε κόσμος εἴτε ζωὴ εἴτε θάνατος, εἴτε ἐνεστώτα εἴτε μέλλοντα· πάντα ὑμῶν, 3.23 ὑμεῖς δὲ Χριστοῦ, Χριστὸς δὲ θεοῦ.

The final metaphor of Paul in verses eighteen through twenty-one turns to focus on wisdom. Here he contrasts true and false wisdom, much in the same way James does in 3:13-17 of his writing. The Corinthians had adopted the conventional definition of wisdom from the world around them. And this was false wisdom and consequently had led them into the huge mess that existed at Corinth.

What people in our world think is smart is not necessarily so. And when this kind of thinking is brought into church life it can be disastrous. Let me illustrate. The world defines success by numbers and budgets. Is our church successfully only when attendance is increasing and giving is growing? By the world's standards, yes. By God's standards, not really. God is far more interested in spiritual growth than He is in numerical growth. We could double our attendance and double our giving, but still be an utter failure in God's eyes. If that growth only means 'live bodies' showing up in church and the membership roll being packed with superficially committed members, then our church is going down hill toward spiritual disaster.



God's wisdom is the only genuine way to measure things. Paul admonishes us to throw aside the world's wisdom in order to adopt God's wisdom: "If you think that you are wise in this age, you should become fools so that you may become wise."

God's wisdom isn't understood by the world. Paul has already made that clear in 2:7-8:

But we speak God's wisdom, secret and hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

The center piece of that divine wisdom Paul declares to be Jesus Christ (1:18-25):

For the message about the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is

...the wisdom of God, the wisdom of the hidden, which God decreed before the ages for our glory. None of the rulers of this age understood this; for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. The center piece of that divine wisdom Paul declares to be Jesus Christ (1:18-25):

the power of God. For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discerning I will thwart." Where is the one who is wise? Where is the scribe? Where is the debater of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, God decided, through the foolishness of our proclamation, to save those who believe. For Jews demand signs and Greeks desire wisdom, but we proclaim Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those who are the called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For God's foolishness is wiser than human wisdom, and God's weakness is stronger than human strength.

Paul applied his metaphor of wisdom in 3:21-23 to the divisions existing in the church:

21 So let no one boast about human leaders. For all things are yours, 22 whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future — all belong to you, 23 and you belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God.

The Corinthians had to get over their 'preacher worship' sickness. They were to stop elevating one spiritual leader over another. The cross of Jesus Christ should be the central focus. Everything both they and the spiritual leaders in their midst did had to focus on that one central truth. They had to realize that they -- yea, everything in creation -- belongs to God and is responsible to God.

How can we become a wise church? We won't achieve it if we measure things by the world's standards. We must adopt God's standards and use God's wisdom. In the context of Paul's emphasis on divine wisdom in the first four chapters of First Corinthians, we understand that His wisdom centers on the cross. Thus everything we do must be anchored in the cross of Christ. That wisdom of God is reflected, as Paul says in 4:20, not on talk but upon spiritual power. God's kingdom, that is, God's rule and reign in our church and in our lives, expresses itself in spiritual power. And spiritual power is changed lives under the leadership of God's Spirit walking in complete obedience to Christ.

Then and only then can we become a truly spiritual congregation.

CONCLUSION

How smart are you? Not book smart. But God smart. God's ways are not man's ways. How much do you really understand about being spiritual and about serving Christ?

Paul challenges us profoundly to become genuinely spiritual and genuinely wise as a church, and as individual believers. God help us to move this way!