

T. Shane Martin
 Green Run Baptist Church
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GENUINE SPIRITUALITY: A STUDY OF 1 CORINTHIANS

#8

**WE BELONG TO CHRIST
 1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-23**

INTRODUCTION

Paul continues to correct the Corinthians regarding their divisions within their local church. The church is at odds with Paul and to some degree, with one another. Their divisions were driven by pride as they aligned themselves behind various leaders within the church. Paul corrected them by reminding them that their true identity was to be shaped by the cross of Christ and not by any other human leader with whom they aligned themselves. When our identities are shaped by the cross, boasting in any other thing except the cross is prohibited. Paul also corrects their understanding of church leadership. True leaders within the church are servants of Christ. These gifted leaders are not to be elevated to a place which should only be reserved for Christ. Paul continues to correct their high-minded view of church leaders by pointing out that such divisions within the church are not only sinful, but foolish. His goal is to produce genuine spiritual disciples whose entire identity has been transformed by the cross and in today's text Paul reminds them of their rich heritage in Jesus Christ.

1. GENUINE SPIRITUALITY GROWS OUT OF HUMBLY ACCEPTING THE WISDOM OF GOD RATHER THAN THE FOOLISHNESS OF MAN (3:18-20)

The Corinthians were true believers, but they were believers who had been seduced by the world's foolishness. Driven by their own pride, individual preferences and private ambitions, they aligned themselves behind particular church leaders and consequently, they put the church in great danger (vv17-18). Paul counseled them to see this situation for what it was; self-deception (v18). They had deceived themselves because this appeared to them to be wisdom when it actually was destructive foolishness. Furthermore, Paul reminds them that they must accept the wisdom of God rather than the foolishness of man. They could not have it both ways; either their identity was to be shaped by the cross or by their own personal ambitions and achievements. Paul's point is that they could not have it both ways. They could not simultaneously be wise in the eyes of the world and the eyes of God. The world ignores God and spurns His commands. God calls us to become obedient to Him in a way that causes the unbelieving world to consider us fools. The way the world responds to God's message of the cross proves that it thinks the gospel is foolish. The world considers us to be fools and the temptation is to seek respectability in their eyes by watering down the gospel or slipping gradually into compromise.

Paul supports this premise by quoting from two Old Testament passages (vv19-20). First of all, we are to avoid worldly wisdom because *He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS* (Job 5:13). Secondly, Paul quotes Psalm 94:11, *THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS*. He uses both passages to warn the worldly wise man not to be impressed by his own wisdom that ignores and spurns God because God will not be deceived by the man's false wisdom. He will see it for what it is; foolishness that

results from a desire to live life without God. We must answer this question, “Whose approval matters most to me?”

2. GENUINE SPIRITUALITY GROWS OUT OF AN AWARENESS THAT GOD HAS GIVEN HIS CHILDREN ALL THINGS FOR THEIR GOOD (3:21-23)

Paul now explains how their view of Christian leaders has embraced the wisdom of the world and denied the wisdom of God. First of all, they have boasted in these men in a way that should be reserved exclusively for Jesus. Therefore, Paul commands, *So then let no one boast in men* (v21). Secondly, Paul deepens their understanding of God’s good gift in providing leaders for His church and this principle is expressed in one statement, *For all things belong to you* (v21).

The Corinthians failed to recognize that all Christian leaders are good gifts from God. They did not have to choose a favorite and then form cliques behind their respective leader of choice. With an appreciation for God’s wisdom, they are to appreciate their leaders and realize that all of these leaders belong to the church for the church’s good *whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas* (v22). To “belong” to Paul was to ignore God’s good gift of Apollos or Cephas. This is the reality, no Christian should claim to “belong” to any one leader, but we should realize that all of these leaders belong to us for our edification. That is not to claim that every leader who claims to be a Christian leader is truly Christian. We must measure a man by his faithfulness to God’s Word both in his life and teaching. But when we find faithful men, we should thank God for all of them and not encourage divisiveness in our attempt to elevate one leader over another. We have a rich inheritance in Christian leaders from the past and we too often ignore their wisdom to our own peril.

But our inheritance does not end with Christian leaders, past and present. Paul goes on to teach the Corinthians that he really meant *all things belong to you* (v21). He defines *all things* as *the world or life or death or things present or things to come*. Then he reiterates *all things belong to you*. This statement is meant to be all inclusive.

What Paul is doing here is helping us see Christ’s superiority to all teachers. Christ not only gives those teachers to His church, but He also gives *all things* to His church. By *all things* Paul means *this world, life, death, things present and things to come* (v22). Both Don Carson and Gordon Fee note that these five things comprise *the fundamental tyrannies of human life* (Carson). In other words, as sinners living in a world that has been cursed by God for its rebellion, these are the realities that produce fear in us.

In the world you have tribulation, but take courage; I have overcome the world (John 16:33).

For this reason I say to you, do not worry about your life, as to what you will eat; nor for your body, as to what you will put on. For life is more than food, and the body more than clothing (Luke 12:22-23)

The last enemy that will be abolished is death (1 Corinthians 15:26)

So do not worry about tomorrow; for tomorrow will care for itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own (Matthew 6:34).

These verses remind us that we are often facing tribulation, worries about the present and the future and finally, the fear of death. But because of Jesus, all of these realities need no longer be feared. They belong to us. They exist to serve God's good purposes in our lives.

Paul finally explains how this can be true. It is true first of all because *Christ belongs to God* (v23). That is to say that in His plan to save sinners, Christ submitted to His Father for the purpose of our redemption. Secondly, *you belong to Christ* (v23). Because Jesus is our representative, everything He obtained in His life, death and resurrection is ours. So in summary, all things belong to us because all things belong to Him who is our federal head.

CONCLUSION

Paul points out the foolishness of the Corinthians' petty squabbles over human leaders by pointing out their ultimate inheritance. God has not given them one teacher; He has given them all His appointed teachers. Beyond that, God has given every believer these teachers plus: *this world, life, death, things present and things to come*. There is no need to compete with one another for some rank or privilege when in the end, *all things belong to you*.