



## Making a Self Assessment -- 1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Paul began chapter three speaking about division in the church and concluded in verse 17 that God would bring to destruction anyone who destroys the church. The Corinthian Christians must be involved in church building; not church destroying. Their labours in church building should involve the use of their gifts as they considered the eternal benefits of church building and as they contemplated its seriousness.

1 Corinthians 3:18-23 serve as a transition from Paul's thoughts about division in the previous verses and his comments on leadership beginning in chapter 4. In these verses Paul addresses the topic of how a Christian should think about himself. (These verses closely mirror Paul's thoughts in 1 Cor. 1:18-31).

### **I. Think Honestly**

Verse 18 begins with a strong imperative: *"Let no one deceive himself."* The tense of this phrase in the original language indicates that this is a command for the Corinthian Christians to stop doing something that they were doing. They had been and still were in the process of deceiving themselves. They had convinced themselves of untruth. Apparently the Corinthian Christians had a lofty view of themselves and the leaders of their faction within the congregation. They thought themselves right and all others wrong. Self deception may be the most common type of deception.

- 1. How were the Galatians deceiving themselves? (Gal. 6:7-8)**
- 2. List some examples of how people deceive themselves today.**
- 3. Describe some reasons why people deceive themselves.**

### **II. Consider the Origin of Your Wisdom**

In the second phrase of verse 18 we get to the heart of the problem: the self-deception was causing the disunity within the Corinthian congregation. Human wisdom caused the Corinthian Christians to measure one teacher against another and to choose to follow the one they reasoned to be superior. The "wisdom" they used came from "this age" indicating that it was humanly derived. Using the wisdom of the non-Christian world around them was not an indication of real wisdom, but rather showed them to be ignorant in the most important and true wisdom.



This passage points us back to the end of chapter one where Paul teaches that the “*word of the cross is folly*” to the unsaved and that God will “*destroy the wisdom of the wise.*” Human wisdom and God’s wisdom are very different. Human wisdom brought disunity by promoting factions in the church.

The way that one becomes “wise” is to become a “fool” according to verse 18. Paul is teaching that if a person depends on the wisdom that is found in the world, he will fail. Instead, true wisdom has its origin in God and in his instruction; which the world finds foolish.

#### Biblical Paradoxes

1 Cor. 3:18 -- To become wise, one must become a fool.

Matt. 10:39 -- To find your life, you must lose it.

Matt. 20:26 -- To become great, you must become a servant.

2 Cor. 12:10 -- When I am weak, I am strong

#### 4. How does one become a fool so that they might become wise?

#### 5. How does God regard the wisdom of the world?

Paul quotes from Job 5:13 in verse 19: “*He catches the wise in their craftiness.*” No matter how wise a man might believe himself to be, he is “caught” by God who knows all. This verse goes so far as to say that it is man’s own craftiness that leads to his capture. The very wisdom in which he revels brings him to ruin.

Next Paul quotes Psalm 94:11: “*The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.*” Again we are reminded that nothing is hidden from God and nothing escapes the mind of God (even to the thoughts of a man). Man’s wisdom is futile or useless because it has no power and leads to destruction.

### III. Be Careful About Your Boasting

In verse 21 Paul gives another imperative: “*Let no one boast in men.*” As in verse 18, the grammar of the original language indicates they were to stop the boasting they were still doing. Clearly the boasting was about their factions as one claimed to follow Paul, another Apollos, and another Cephas (see also 1 Cor. 1:12).

#### 6. What is boasting?

#### 7. What might have prompted the Corinthians to boast in “men?”

#### 8. Is it ever right to boast? (1:31)

Boasting in their relationship to certain men was in fact limiting the blessings available to them. The last phrase of verse 21 says, “*For all things are yours.*” They could lay claim to every promise of God, every good and perfect gift from God was theirs, and no promise or revelation was for the exclusive use of any faction. No teacher could give them a blessing from God that was not available to every Christian. Every teacher (Paul, Apollos, and Cephas) had something significant to share, the world (God’s creation) was available for all to enjoy, life was theirs to live in abundance, death held no terror for they would go to be with the Lord, and all blessings present or future were theirs.

#### **IV. Remember Whose You Are**

The greatest self-assessment the Corinthian Christians needed to make was to see themselves as a possession of Christ. Paul writes in verse 23, “*and you are Christ’s.*” No one should align themselves with any Bible teacher or any leader against another. Christians do not belong to earthly leaders, no matter how much we love them or they love us. Christians belong only to Christ.



In 1 Cor. 1:12, some in the church said, “*I follow Paul,*” another “*I follow Apollos,*” still another said “*I follow Cephas,*” and finally some said, “*I follow Christ.*” Paul now sets the record straight. You do not belong to any man or to any faction; you belong to Christ.

#### **9. What does it mean to belong to Christ?**

Paul is not teaching that God the Father is superior to Christ when he says “*and Christ is God’s,*” but Christ did submit himself to the Father while on earth to accomplish his will.

Each Christian should assess himself and his relationship with Christ. We should honestly evaluate our lives and not deceive ourselves. We should determine to follow the wisdom of God as revealed to us in his word and refuse to follow any ungodly wisdom found in this world. We ought to be careful about our boasting; not promoting or following any man, but boasting only in God and what he has done. And finally we should always remember that we belong to Christ. He is our Lord and he is our Saviour.