

True and False Wisdom

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 13 August 2023

Preacher: Ife Ojetayo

[0:00] Strength and our Redeemer. Amen. Please be seated.!

Open your Bible if you have your Bible with you or if you can grab a pew Bible in your pew and follow along. By way of reminder, Paul has been speaking of wisdom so far in 1 Corinthians. That's one of the main themes so far. Specifically, two kinds of wisdom. One is worldly, man-made wisdom that is doomed.

Paul said it is perishing. The other wisdom, although the world does not see it as such yet, is the everlasting God-given wisdom of God.

And Paul had sought to show the Corinthians that this wisdom that is from God is revealed supremely at the cross. And the related good news that goes with that of the Gospel is the Gospel of Jesus Christ that proclaims the event of that cross.

[1:31] And that Gospel is nothing less than the declaration of the power of God and the wisdom of God. So far, Paul has been telling us. Telling us. And Paul wants us to know, along with the Corinthians, he wants us to know this Gospel.

To place our confidence in this proclamation of this truth of Christ crucified. And more than that, he wants us not to be like the Corinthians, who will shine away from this truth.

They become embarrassed by it. Or they think they can go beyond it. That is, beyond the cross.

This Corinthian problem is that they have started to leave the cross behind.

They have started to think like the world around them. That things of the cross as foolishness or as weak. Of course, I think the Corinthians must recognize that the cross was the instrument of their salvation.

But they have succumbed to the temptation to dumb down its message. They began to mask the Gospel in lofty human speech.

[2:49] That means that they began to employ the world's language and the world's meaning to describe the wisdom of God. And that is precisely the Corinthian problem.

that Paul is warning them against. Because they have started to do something that must not be done. They have started to... Two things that are diametrically opposed.

The wisdom of the world and the wisdom of God. They have started to use the wisdom of the world to explain the wisdom of God. And that's Paul's point all along so far in 1 Corinthians.

Go back to the cross. To Christ crucified. Recognize that therein lies the power and wisdom of God. He warns them against this preoccupation with man-made wisdom.

And you know, in our day, the Corinthian problem is widespread, isn't it? Churches have become centers of entertainment. Sermon series on odd topics of the day.

[3:58] I read an article this week that one of the trends now in churches, right now, currently, is sermon series on the Barbie movie.

I'm glad to see the look of disgust on most of your faces. That, that as your pastor, actually comforts me a bit.

Thank you. Yeah, but it is exactly what I thought as well. Sermon series on the Barbie movie. I mean, from their perspective, the structure, like, we're going to talk about... But that's part of the chasing after the wisdom of the world.

That Paul wants to warn us against here in 1 Corinthians. I also saw a clip this week of a church where they had another sermon series of movies during the summer.

I think it's the summers when they do these things. Summer series on odd topics of the day. And the pastor was dressed in, what's that, Pixar movie, Toy Story. And it was, the theme was the Toy Story sermon series.

[5:02] And that's, that's, that's the Corinthian problem that it's invaded. It's, it's prevailing in our day as well. And I don't know how you feel about that.

I, I wrote here that perhaps some of you find that interesting. But I, I can see that most of you don't, don't. I'm, I'm glad to see that. Um, but some, some find it interesting.

Some, someone, why don't, why don't we, that seems fun. That seems relevant. That's the word that's used. But Paul wants us to know that those methods are futile.

Because God has proposed, Paul says it in chapter one of first Corinthians, God has proposed and planned to destroy such means, such wisdom of the world.

God, in fact, ashamed those, those ways in order to bring them to nothing, Paul tells us. So that he can exalt the, the wisdom of Christ crucified, the gospel of our salvation.

[6:08] Yet, just like the Corinthians, even today Christians are embarrassed to proclaim Christ crucified. as Paul did to the Corinthians.

Instead, many today preach, you know, therapeutic sermons. And worship becomes man-centered instead of Christ-centered. And this is all rampant in our day.

And it betrays, it betrays, it shows a preoccupation in our day, just like in the Corinthians today, with carnal things, with worldly things, rather than truly spiritual things.

And so Paul goes on in his, in his, in his argument, in his, in his letter to the first Corinthians, in verse 6. He says, Yet among the mature, we do impart wisdom.

Remember, he's been saying that there are, we should, we should leave the wisdom of the world, because it is perishing, and the ways of the world. And he's highlighted the wisdom of God, which is, the word considers foolishness and weak.

[7:17] But he's saying, therein lies the power of God. And now he's saying in verse 6, Yet among the mature, we do impart wisdom. Although it is not a wisdom of this age, or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away.

But we impart a secret, an hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed, before the ages, for our glory. Now, Paul's use of the word, mature in verse 6, is actually meant to be sarcastic.

This is Paul being, employing some sarcasm, in his letter to the Corinthians. That word, mature, is a word that Corinthians use, to refer to themselves.

To denote, to convey that they are spiritually mature, they are, they are, they are complete.

Actually, that's the Greek word, it's teleos, which means complete, mature.

And so, they often use that word. So, Paul is saying, he seems like Paul is saying to them, yet among you Corinthians, who are so, spiritual, so mature, we communicate the true, hidden wisdom of God.

[8:37] The maturity of the Corinthians, is in fact, not any, any godly maturity at all. It is in fact, childish, arrogant, self-centered.

And that's why Paul will go on in chapter 3, verse 1, and writes to them, I cannot address you as spiritually mature. I can't address you as spiritually mature people.

Even though, you like to think of yourselves as spiritually mature, I can't address you as such.

When in fact, you are spiritual babies, infants. And Paul says, there is a stark difference between the Corinthians' self-perception of themselves and the actual reality of their spiritual state.

The Corinthian affinity for the word teleos, mature, in reality, amounts to childish, self-centered ways.

the kind of maturity that is self-centered, that manipulates things for self-promotion and advantage.

And if you recognize that, that is the maturity of the world, isn't it?

[9:42] It's worldly maturity. That is the shrewdness of the world. It is the acquisition of knowledge and power and wealth for selfish ends.

And the church of Christ must operate in total opposite way than the world does.

But the tragedy is that this Corinthian problem, despite its popularity in the church, despite the fact that many, just like in the days of the Corinthian church, are starting to adopt the ways of the world, the tragedy is that when we do that, when we bypass the cross, when we get embarrassed by the message of Christ crucified, we start to preach a different gospel.

And it is a gospel that cannot save people. This gospel cannot save people from sin because it has foolishly bypassed the only power that can bring about salvation, the cross of Christ.

And when people in the church of Christ start to believe and adopt this wisdom, the same issues that crop up in Corinth will happen in our day and as happen and will happen in churches that adopt

that.

[11:05] You know, the Corinthians are not unique in their problems, you see. After all, we've already established that there are great similarities between the world of 1st century Corinth and our 21st century world.

And so what Paul says, you might think you're mature, but we actually, when we came to, we imparted, we impart wisdom. A wisdom that is secreted in wisdom of God.

This is God-given wisdom. True wisdom. The God-given one. which is sought by those who are truly mature. Now, Paul's use of the word mature is the real spiritual maturity.

And it is sought not for selfish ends like the world seeks knowledge and wisdom, not for self-promoting ends, means, but it is sought for the good of all within the body of Christ.

For the improvement of the church and the glory and honor of Christ. That is true spiritual maturity and wisdom. Paul says, this is the wisdom that we impart or proclaim to you.

[12:17] A secret and hidden wisdom of God which God decreed before the ages for our glory. The world's wisdom is perishing in contrast to this wisdom of God which is everlasting.

This wisdom is not of this age. it cannot be acquired by stacking PhDs upon PhDs. The point here is not that education isn't important.

That's not what Paul is saying at all. Paul is probably one of the most educated men of his age. The point here is not that there is no value at all in earthly wisdom such as it is.

the point is that we should not respect those who have actually taken time to study in a particular field. Nor is Paul saying that being a Christian is like it's like that you know that old TV commercial of the people who stayed in the Holiday Inn Express.

Does anyone know what I'm talking about? it's a commercial and there's this man in a hospital theater and everyone thinks he's the lead surgeon and the nurses and the anesthesiologists were giving him his scaffold and they gave it to him and then he took down his mask and they realized he wasn't the doctor and then he was like well I stayed at Holiday Inn Express last night.

[13:54] It's a silly commercial but you know but that's not what Christianity means it doesn't mean that once you become a Christian all of a sudden you become you know you have access to all sorts of knowledge and field.

Some people some Christians tend to think that way that's not what Paul is advocating here. You know after all if I or anyone in my family needs urgent medical care I won't bring them here to the church and say oh you Christians brothers and sisters in Christ you have the truly hidden wisdom of God can you guys prescribe the right solution to their medical problems?

I will not do that. I mean I will ask you to pray for them but I will take them to the hospital. The same as if I were in legal trouble and I need legal help I'll ask Karen Martin or Ray Dague for advice before I ask anyone else because they're actually they've actually studied the law.

So that the point that Paul is making is that earthly knowledge is of no use but he is trying to say that earthly the truth is as long as we remain in the world rather as long as we remain in this world there is going to be some use for earthly knowledge and earthly wisdom and experts but that's just it it's earthly this knowledge and this wisdom it is earthly the medical doctor the lawyer the airplane palette expertise is useful even helpful in matters that pertain to earthly matters but when it comes to the weightier things of God the spiritual things the eternal truths no human wisdom is of any use in leading to salvation no human wisdom is of any use in continuing in the new life with Christ that's the point that Paul is making that he wants us to grasp the only wisdom that works in this regard is the God given wisdom of God but Paul said but Paul said this wisdom is hidden what does he mean by that he said that it is secret it is a mystery you know when Paul speaks of secret or mystery or hidden he doesn't mean that it's something that is a puzzle that it's left to us to decipher that's not what he means by it is a secret he's been saying all along that human wisdom is of no use and so we can't think that we would need human human faculties and human means to to reveal this wisdom of God when Paul says secret what he means by that is in verse 7 that this wisdom of Christ which is the wisdom of Christ crucified is in fact

God's unfolding plan of salvation that is now fully revealed in Christ Jesus through the apostolic message this wisdom of Christ of Christ crucified was formerly unknown but now it's been disclosed by Jesus Christ and by his apostles so it was formerly a mystery it was formerly secret but God himself has revealed it God's wisdom is not something we can figure out by our human intellect it is a secret that must be received that must be known by revelation and that distinction is crucial right it cannot be deciphered by human human intellect it must be known by God given revelation that's

why in fact you can have a PhD in the Bible and there are many who do who know the original [18:09] Greek and the Hebrew like the back of their hands yet they do have they have no knowledge of the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified that leads them to saving faith well they know the Bible they can read it in all the different languages it's been written they know they've studied theology but they have no true wisdom that leads to salvation and on the other hand you can be illiterate you can be an unschooled man woman or child and yet you can have you can have in ever increasing measure this wisdom that is given by God why is that it's not because of human intellect it is revelation God given it's a gift of God and the difference is that those who have the wisdom of God have then a transformed mind through the Holy Spirit that's what Paul lands in verse 10 so if you know if it were possible that this knowledge can be given in any other way than other than through the

Holy Spirit if it was possible for human minds to come to this wisdom then wouldn't at least a few of the wise men of the age have come to it by now that's Paul's argument in verse 8 he says in verse 8 none of the rulers of this age understood this for if they had if they had understood it they would not have crucified the Lord of glory for as it is written now Paul now quotes the prophet Isaiah in chapter 64 and 65 as it is written what no eye has seen or no hear heard nor the heart of man imagined what God has prepared for those who love him you know when Paul refers to the rulers of this age in verse 8 Paul is speaking about those who the world accords as wise the political leaders of our day the powerful the influential members of human society the institutions that control human culture the media the colleges the universities those are the rulers of this age if they have come to this truth they would not have crucified in Paul's day if those rulers of

Paul's days of the age of four have come to this truth they would not have crucified the Lord of glory but in their foolishness they fail to see Jesus as he truly is that he is the Messiah of God the Lord of all the ages the king who will stand in judgment over every soul on the last day they fail to see that the rulers of Paul's day didn't recognize Jesus the rulers of our age don't recognize Jesus either in our day Jesus is at best a wonderful teacher on par with other wonderful wise gurus of history or at worst he is a fabrication of foolish religious people the wisdom of the world cannot can never comprehend who Jesus truly is these things these precious things that no eye has seen nor hear heard nor the heart of man imagined these very precious things these lively oracles of God has been revealed to those who love him through the spirit and this is to

God's everlasting glory and we will continue next week because we're going we're not going to get to verse 16 so we'll stop in verse 10 here but we will continue next week and address the first person plural of us in verse 10 and the we in verse 12 that Paul uses what does Paul have in mind when he uses those pronouns but before we end this morning I wonder if we might take some time together to look at what Paul is saying here from our context here at Holy Trinity Syracuse the wonderful good news is that we are the church of Christ we have the revelation of this wisdom of God through the Holy Spirit we are among those who have believed the gospel of Jesus Christ crucified unto salvation but we can be and we are at times if we're honest with ourselves we can be like the

Corinthians we like them have the because the Corinthians also have the wisdom of God we like them have the wisdom of God and we have the Holy Spirit enabling us yet we we can be tempted to set the true true wisdom aside in pursuit of worldly false wisdom that is due to fail and so the foundational question the foundational question is this and it's a question that we all of us must answer and ponder in our hearts every single one of us the question is this who are you going to listen to are you going to listen to God's graciously revealed wisdom or are you going to listen to the wisdom of the age you know we live in a world that is even more obsessed with man made wisdom than any time in human history we live in a world that has easy access to all sorts of knowledge after all this is the age of podcasts of tech talks of the 24 hours news cycle infotainment and the social media influences the internet puts all sorts of information at our fingertips and even in spiritual areas you have access to Christian books to different versions of the Bible that no one else has in history you have access to preachers beyond just the town that you live in but all this information how are we to navigate all of this in our context can I suggest a few things that we must ask the people of

[25:08] God be committed to and focused on first we must distinguish between wisdom and information Christians must be seekers of wisdom not just mere information you know those who amass information for knowledge sake will become puffed up one can be puffed up by knowledge

do you know that I went through four years of seminary and it's by the grace of God that I was not puffed up and this is always a danger of people in seminary education one of the great prayers is God keep me humble but even as I learn and I study the deeper things of your word that I would not become puffed up by but I remain humble under your word knowledge can puff up any kind of knowledge can puff up one can be puffed up by even spiritual knowledge and that's what Paul would later warn the

Corinthians of this very thing they've become puffed up by their knowledge and when you become puffed up this leads to prideful boasting it leads to personal ambition and self promotion in the church instead of mutually submitting to one another which is what Paul calls us to do in Ephesians out of reverence for Christ so knowledge pops up and Paul will characterize that as actual immaturity rather than true wisdom which leads to mutual submission to one another out of reverence for Christ so we must distinguish between the pursuit of wisdom and the pursuit of just mere information and second thing we ought to do as the people of God that we must commit to do is the pursuit of wisdom requires a willingness to receive and listen who are we receiving from we're receiving from God he's the one that gives the wisdom remember it's

God given wisdom so there must be a willingness to receive from God through the means he is ordained to reveal himself to us and what does that mean what are those means it is through the inherent word of God contained in the holy scriptures you know I can't help but think of the words said to Elizabeth the second and Charles the third at their coronation they were presented with a Bible way more ornate than this one but still containing the true treasure of the words inside they were presented with the Bible and the presenter charged them with these words we present you this book the most valuable thing that this world affords hear his wisdom this is the royal law these are the lively oracles of God how truly wonderful would it be if we were all to listen to this admonishment and apply it to ourselves to listen to God's word preached when we gather among the saints to meditate on God's word word on a daily basis to pursue wisdom requires a willingness to receive and listen you cannot become wise unless you are willing to receive and listen at least God's wisdom that's the way that's the way it works and lastly how can we possess this true wisdom how can we possess it as we've been seen it is not true human discovery it is God's revelation and it must be received as a gift and like all of God's gift it must be then applied to our lives that there is where our wisdom actually develops while information can just be acquired true wisdom must not only be received but must be acted upon we must be ready to apply the truth of God's word to every aspect of our lives this is what obeying God looks like this is what true wisdom looks like and you know when it comes to applying

God's word to every aspect of our lives it can be costly it can be hard in fact not only can it be it will be hard and it will sometimes be costly but this is what the pursuit of wisdom looks like in contrast to mere acquisition of worldly knowledge may God help us and continue to help us by his Holy Spirit to be people who pursue the God given wisdom of God in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit Amen