

Wisdom And Maturity

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- [0 : 00] as your people, to hear your word. And in all the words of this service and this sermon, help us to distinguish what is your word to us.
- We ask this in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen.
- What shall I do, since my master is taking the stewardship away from me? I'm not strong enough to dig, and I am ashamed to beg. I read that to you to tell you that that's not the text I'm preaching on this morning.
- In case you thought so. I'm going to continue in 1 Corinthians chapter 3, and I'll leave consideration of that for another time.
- 1 Corinthians chapter 3, which Gene Hyatt read for us, is a wonderful chapter, and it seems even more appropriate for this morning.
- [1 : 19] And I just am anxious to be able to share it with you, because it talks about congregations, the congregation of the church in Corinth.
- It talks about ministers and their limitations, and it talks about the ongoing or continuing work of God.
- And that seems appropriate to me. The essential problem with congregations... I really want to be nice to you for the next couple of Sundays.
- And it's hard. But the essential problem with congregations, if you look at 1 Corinthians, is 1 Corinthians 3, is that congregations seem to suffer from immaturity.
- And so Paul goes after this problem in 1 Corinthians chapter 3. And it's the kind of immaturity that was spoken of in Luke's gospel, chapter 8, verse 14, in the parable of the seed, the soil, and the sowers, when he talks about the seed...
- [2 : 48] I got it wrong. But anyway, it talks...
- You know, it's the seed that was sown among thorns, and the things that came in the way of... Sorry, I got the wrong gospel.
- I'm in really quite bad shape. It's Luke chapter 8, verse 14. And this is what it says about immaturity.
- As for the seed that fell among the thorns, they are those who hear, but as they go on their way, they are choked by the cares and riches and pleasures of life, and their fruit does not mature.
- One of the primary things that comes up in a congregation is how does a congregation achieve some level of maturity? We give a lot of time and a lot of thought to the business of evangelism, bringing people to put their faith in Jesus Christ.
- [4 : 04] But the problem that we run into is how do they, having come to faith in Jesus Christ, how do they go on to maturity? And Paul says that the Corinthian church did not go on to maturity.
- They were well endowed with gifts, but they didn't mature. And he said these were the signs of immaturity in the congregation.

First, that they were like ordinary men. They were men of the flesh, which isn't particularly bad.

You wouldn't, I mean, you meet lots of them, and perhaps we are lots of them. But it says that we're men of the flesh like ordinary men.

And that is that our Christian life does not distinguish us from anybody else. We are in the same culture, following the same dictates, being as in the usual pattern, self-interested, self-centered, self-contained, egocentric kind of people.

[5 : 19] And that though we are, he says, secondly, not only like ordinary people, we are still babes in Christ. And there Paul doesn't deny the reality of our faith.

He doesn't deny the fact that we have been born again, but he does say that we haven't grown up. We are still babes in Christ.

So that he's not denying the reality of the faith of the congregation. He's questioning the lack of maturity. Another picture that he gives, he gives of their immaturity is that they go on living on milk and not solid food.

Kind of perpetual spiritual junk food. And not the kind of thing that helps you to grow up into all that belongs to you in Christ.

And that's the problem that Paul is having with them because he says, there is a wisdom that belongs to you. There is an understanding of the gospel that belongs to you.

[6 : 28] There are implications of the gospel that you've never even begun to think about, and yet they belong to you. And yet you're not ready to receive them. And you live in a perpetual state of immaturity with respect to the gospel.

And that was a devastating criticism of the church in Corinth, that the riches that belonged to them, they were not willing or able to take up. They tried to live on a diet of milk.

And Paul says, the sign of your immaturity again is that there is jealousy and strife among you. And those are quite normal things in the world in which we live.

Jealousy and strife. It's right to be jealous of those who are beyond you in Christ so that you become like them. But then jealousy is sort of like milk.

It goes sour. And it becomes a kind of an aggressive jealousy, which does enormous amount of damage. And so he says, among you as a congregation, he's addressing the Corinthians, remember.

[7 : 41] He says, among you as a congregation, is this continuing sick kind of jealousy? And it's producing strife.

Now, those aren't, those are garden variety realities in any group of people, jealousy and strife. You don't have to scratch any group very deeply to find that.

But Paul says, it's inappropriate for you as Christians. And then he says, you're divided up into gangs. You gain your strength and your identity and your power from belonging to a gang.

And you know that gangs is, gangs seem to be in Vancouver, at least a symbol of frustrated teenagers. And that they gather into gangs.

And he said, the church in Corinth were gathering into gangs and saying, I belong to this gang. I belong to this gang. I belong to this gang. And that breakdown was, again, a sign of the immaturity of the church in Corinth.

[8 : 49] Another sign of immaturity was that their wisdom was worldly wisdom and that they prided themselves on their wisdom in terms of the world. And they weren't prepared to take the risk of becoming fools in the world in order to have the wisdom that God wanted them to have.

They held on to their reputation for worldly wisdom that ultimately meant more to them. And I think this is true for lots of business people who are in the business world every day and who make their money by having a kind of wisdom of the world and take great pride in that.

Having it, I don't think, is wrong necessarily that if we have to live in the world and we live in this sort of no man's land between the world and the kingdom, that kind of wisdom is, we shouldn't stake our lives on it.

He said we should be careful that we are willing to be foolish in order that we may be wise. So he says that is the sign of immaturity in this congregation.

Got it? You have to apply it if it applies, but those are the signs of immaturity in the congregations in Corinth. And then he gives three powerful pictures of God's activity.

[10 : 20] And God is the one who is a farmer and plants and waters and brings to harvest.

God is a builder who digs and establishes a foundation on which people build. And God is the living presence among us, which we have by reason of the relationship he draws us into with himself and his word in fellowship one with another and in response to the word that he's spoken to us so that he makes us into a temple.

So God is a temple builder, a building builder, and a farmer. All these things. That's what God is doing among us. And it's the activity of God among us, Paul says to the Corinthians, that is critically important.

This is what God is doing. And then Paul puts the ministers in their place and tells them what's happening to the ministers.

And he says that you have misunderstood who the ministers are. He says they're not that important. They do their work, they get their wages.

[11 : 40] That's the end of the story. And so your loyalty is not to what they do, but to what God is doing among you. And he says they are only people who work for God and get paid by God, but you don't have to, you know, that's not the important thing.

The important thing is the work that God himself is doing. He says, virtually, they are nothing. When he says, I planted a polis water, think of that in the tiniest possible print that you've got to have a magnifying glass to see.

And then in large page-sized letters, read the rest of the verse. It's God that gives the increase. And you'll see the perspective on ministers, which is held in 1 Corinthians chapter 3.

It is that ongoing activity of God. Now you know that an immature congregation then can exalt ministers and almost get to the point where they're not aware of God doing anything.

Ministers can do that themselves too. That's why they climb up into pulpits and things like that. But it's that emphasis that Paul wants to establish among the people.

[13 : 10] That it is God's work and he is the farmer, he is the builder, he brings together the temple of the people of God in which the word of Christ is alive in the hearts of the people of that community and in their relationship to one another.

All those things happen. And God uses ministers like Paul and Apollos and others to do it, but it is essentially his work.

And it's he that carries the work on. I don't know how to relate that to the present situation, but I mean the situation that I'm in.

But the really exciting thing about St. John's is the work of God and the continuity of that work. And if there was any danger of this congregation suffering in some measure from immaturity, and if there was any danger in this congregation of ministers being exalted into a more important role than they should properly have in this work, then it's important that that problem should be redressed and that there should be a new awareness of how it's all meant to work.

And you can see it that ministers come along and, you know, we're all ministers in that sense, but what we do, Paul says, is they come along and they build on a foundation which God has established.

[15 : 12] They build on it and sometimes they build with wood and hay and stubble, sometimes with gold and silver and precious stones. And he said the fire comes along and lets you know how valuable that work is.

Then there's a word of grace for ministers too because it says that even though their work may be destroyed by fire, fire representing the judgment of God, he says even though that may happen, they themselves will not be lost because essentially it is God's work who redeems and saves.

And he has done that for them. So you get a wonderful picture, you see, of the importance of understanding the work and activity of God and the importance of not exalting Paul and Apollos and other ministers to a place that is very dangerous for them and very deceiving for the congregation.

And that's why I feel sorry for people in this congregation who are not aware of the gracious and wonderful work that God is doing among us.

They're not in touch with that reality. They are seeing it in terms of competing egos and competing human undertaking.

[16 : 49] and that's not what it's all about. That's just a manifestation of our sinfulness. But the activity of God when you're in touch with that is really very exciting.

And that's why I'd like to just that just seems to me to be an important perspective. So you have the signs of immaturity in a congregation.

you have this chapter saying that the basic activity is the foundations which God lays, the field which God works, the building whose foundation is established by God, the temple that God creates out of the raw material of his people.

All that is the activity of God. and that is the thing that you're to be most aware of. It's then that he in this chapter goes into the question of being of the foolishness of what happens when he says that if anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age let him become a fool that he may become wise.

And that's a kind of. That's that is it seems to me that's the road to a measure of spiritual maturity. And that is that you become aware that the way the world sees things is not the way things are.

[18 : 29] And if you want to see the way things are you don't hide behind the cleverness of this world in discerning what's happening. You in the eyes of this world become a fool in order that you might understand the mystery of God that God has in Christ done for us what we could never do for ourselves.

You see that's humiliating to the world and to the world's wisdom. It says that if you want to understand it by worldly standards you have to become a fool.

Well then the chapter ends by saying therefore it's very important Paul says that you don't boast about men about human beings about your relationship to them or their gifts or their accomplishments or any of those things.

He says what you need to be aware of is that all things are yours whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future it all belongs to you.

You see the wonderful contrast in this chapter is between the immature Christians who go around saying I belong I belong I belong I belong to the Charismatics I belong to the Anglicans I belong to the Catholics I belong to St.

[20 : 06] John Shaughnessy I belong to this and that's the basis of my identity and Paul says no these things belong to you they are yours they are God's gift to you for God's purpose in you and the only one you belong to is Jesus Christ and you are not the slave of the ones you belong to you don't have to do what your belonging dictates to you what you have to do is know that you belong to Christ and Christ belongs to God and all things are yours and you see that's the basis of his appeal for maturity in the congregation he says there is this vast inheritance that God wants to turn over to you and you have to grow up in order to receive it because it's not you belonging it's what belongs to you and and

Paul describes the vastness of this inheritance with great sweeping strokes when he said Paul belongs to you Apollos belongs to you God gave them to you for his purposes among you Cephas belongs to you the world belongs to you life or death belong to you they are all yours for God's purpose to be worked out in you present and the future belong to you because God has given them to you in Christ the only concern you have a recognition that you have to make the basis of your maturity in this world is that you know that you belong to Christ that's all and that's where your freedom comes from you don't belong to anybody else or anything else you belong to Christ and that's the kind of charter of freedom see when you are baptized into the faith you become a child of God a member of Christ and an inheritor of the kingdom so the importance of your maturity is that you grow up in order that you can be responsible for the tremendous inheritance that comes to you with the kingdom

God gives you this in order to demonstrate through you his love for the world which it is his purpose to bring to himself and that's why it's not enough for us to be babes in Christ to be cut in pieces by strife and jealousy it's not enough that we like the pabulum of Christian life and Christian understanding that's not enough it's not enough that you say you belong to this group or that group and thereby hangs your salvation that's nonsense Paul says what has happened to us and for us is that everything belongs to you in Christ it's all yours and you are Christ's and Christ is God's so there could be no human institution in which you would boast there could be no person in whom you could boast why would you need to boast when everything belongs to you and you belong to

Christ that's the only thing of which you need to boast so Paul says four things look at them just let me leave them with you one it's important that you grow up to maturity in Christ you can't play around for the rest of your earthly life you gotta grow up in order to receive the inheritance you've got to understand that ministers are nothing except God's agents in accomplishing his purpose and doing his will that's all plant water so that God can give the increase the understanding thirdly that God is powerfully at work in our lives in our community and in the world in which we live and that

God has entrusted to us this vast inheritance so that our consciousness in relationship to God is that we are set free we don't belong to anything or anybody everything belongs to us by God's gift and we belong to Christ us that's that's how Paul wanted the Corinthians to see themselves and to understand who they were and how critically and vitally important they were because of their awareness of God's work among them he says the judgment will come the fire will come and it'll be destroyed all the superficial and useless stuff will just go up in flames so we need to be aware building on the foundation which God has established we build the things which endure as the evidence of his grace his activity among us in our lives amen let us pray can we just have a few moments of silence and we will be praying about world issues and concerns that I'd like you to pray before we begin for our world in silence be still and know that I am God

[28 : 30] I am exalted in the nations I am exalted in the earth the Lord of hosts is with us the God of Jacob is our refuge thank you father father that you are the god of our refuge the shepherd of our hope the god in whom we place all our confidence now father things are in a dreadful mess in pockets of our world it hurts us to see and to read and to know how people are suffering we don't know what to say we don't know what to do apart from really praying that men and women countries will turn round and that

God in his mercy will have his way now father we do pray for Christians all over these troubled spots that are pushed to the wall in their faith they cling to everything they know and we need to undergird them this morning so now we do pray for Somalia we pray for Bosnia and Yugoslavia we can't believe that this goes on but it does and so father we pray in our prayer book this morning for peace in the world almighty god and merciful father who wouldst have the kingdoms of the world become the kingdom of thy son

Jesus Christ bestow thy blessing we beseech thee upon all who labor for peace and righteousness that the day may be hastened when war shall be no more and thy will shall govern the nations upon earth through the name of Jesus Christ we pray Lord in your mercy hear our prayer now father today many are beginning a new school year and we want for them the very best and so this morning we want to pray for those who devote their lives to the work of education in our schools universities and colleges we thank you father for all that we have gained through education for knowledge for skills for pleasures for new insights help we pray

Lord Jesus help us to continue to learn to be students of your word students of your world now father we want to pray for those students who have come to us from other countries we pray that as they study here they will find friends and fellowship and that they will take full advantage of the opportunities here father this morning we want to pray for those who are ill in body in mind or in spirit we pray especially for those known to us so we pray again and again for

Ben and Elizabeth Thomas we pray for Shirley we pray for Jeannie and for a moment maybe you might want to pray for someone especially close to you father in all these areas where people are ill and troubled we do pray for the families and friends who stand beside them give them courage give them your word in Jesus name I pray now father in closing we want to pray again and thank you for this parish we thank you for the scriptures this morning and for the word that we've heard we thank you for the mysteries of

[35 : 58] Jesus Christ that pervade this place for your blessings on all who share in the life and work of St.

John's and St. Chad's in the ministry of word and music and sacrament and teaching and pastoral care we thank you very much we pray for all members of this congregation father be to them all that they need be to us all that we need now father we pray for the office staff and for our ministers we pray again and thank you for Harry and Fran and their family and we pray that you'll be to them all that they need in these days give them grace and courage and peace we pray in

Jesus name amen we continue to pray as we turn to page 239 of the green book where we make our confession of sins ye that do truly and earnestly repent you of your sins and are in love and charity with your neighbors and intend to lead the new life following the commandments of god and walking from henceforth in his holy ways draw near with faith and take this holy sacrament to your comfort and make your humble confession to almighty god almighty god father of our lord jesus christ maker of all things and judge of all people we acknowledge and confess our manifold sins and wickedness which we from time to time most grievously have committed by thought word and deed against thy divine majesty we do earnestly repent and are heartily sorry for these are misdoings have mercy upon us most merciful father for thy son our lord jesus christ sake forgive us all that is past and grant that we may hereafter serve and please thee in newness of life to the honor and glory of thy name through jesus christ our lord almighty god our heavenly father who of his great mercy hath promised forgiveness of sins to all them that with hearty repentance and true faith turn unto him have mercy upon you pardon and deliver you from all your sins confirm and strengthen you in all goodness and bring you to everlasting life through jesus christ our lord we sing our offertory hymn it's 382 fast can

Thank you.

Thank you.

[40 : 44] Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS

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CHOIR SINGS CHOIR SINGS God of power, the glory of your works fill us with a wonder

and awe.

[44 : 02] Accept our offering this day and help us to live in peace and harmony with all your creation. For the sake of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

We turn to our green books once again on page 243. Prayer B. The Lord be with you.

With the best spirit. Lift up your hearts. We lift them up to the Lord. Let us give thanks unto our Lord God. It is mean and right so to do.

It is very meet, right, and our bounden duty that we should at all times and in all places. Give thanks unto thee, O Lord. Holy Father. Almighty. Everlasting God.

Creator and preserver of all things. Therefore, with angels and archangels. With all the company of heaven. We laud and magnify thy glorious name. Evermore praising thee and singing.

[45 : 08] Holy, holy, holy, holy, holy.

Come upon us. Evermore praising thee, O Lord.

Whose steward is O Lord. Verse rest, ye are not moons nouveau, the name of the Lord. Lord God.

evermoreupid on earth. Father, yet Tu're firmly united. Let us pray.

All glory be to thee, O Lord our God, who didst make us in thine own image and of thy tender mercy didst give thine only Son Jesus Christ to take our nature upon him and to suffer death upon the cross for our redemption.

[46 : 13] He made there a full and perfect sacrifice for the whole world and did institute and in his holy gospel command us to continue a perpetual memory of that his precious death and sacrifice until his coming again.

Who in the same night that he was betrayed took bread and when he had given thanks to thee he broke it and gave it to his disciples saying take, eat, this is my body which is given for you.

Do this in remembrance of me. Likewise after supper he took the cup and when he had given thanks he gave it to them saying drink this all of you for this is my blood of the new covenant which is shed for you and for many for the remission of sins.

Do this as often as you shall drink it in remembrance of me. you and let me show you here. Amen.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. What I have now is look at you a caf. That sounds really great. I see you again with you as often as a■■■ synagogue Church that it is gonna happen there. However, when I did well I really see anything in order I fully Access