

Christ Reformation Church

Tillamook, Oregon

You Must be Born Again!

True repentance begins with knowledge of sin. The eyes of the repentant person are opened. He sees the length and breadth of God's holy law with distress and confusion. He sees the extent, the enormous extent, of his own transgressions. To his surprise, he discovers that he has been under a huge delusion by thinking of himself as a good person with a good heart. He learns that in reality he is wicked, guilty, corrupt, and evil in God's sight. His pride breaks down. His high thoughts melt away. He sees that he is a great sinner. This is the first step in true repentance.

Ryle, J. C.. Repentance - What it Means to Repent and Why We Must Do So (pp. 3-5). Aneko Press. Kindle Edition.

www.sermonaudio.com/crc

www.unholycharade.com (blog)

www.lightfordarktimes.com (blog)

Christ Reformation Church – YouTube Channel (Light for Dark Times)

We Must be Foolish to be Wise

August 25, 2024

Sermon Text: 1 Corinthians 3:18-23

Scripture Reading: Isaiah 55

Isa 55:8 "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," declares the LORD.

Eze 18:29 Yet the house of Israel says, 'The way of the Lord is not just.' O house of Israel, are my ways not just? Is it not your ways that are not just?

It is characteristic of fallen human nature, and the same temptation still resides in the flesh of the Christian – remaining stains from our old man who is dead - ...it is characteristic of fallen human nature to either deny the wisdom of the Lord, or to seek to “improve” upon it. The English Puritan John Owen (1600’s) was well aware of this and sounded a warning to all who would “sharpen God’s Word in the forge of Aristotle” –

“That which we account our wisdom and learning may, if too rigorously given emphasis, be our folly. When we think that we must sharpen the reason of the Scripture, we may restrict the power of the Spirit of it. It is often times more effective in Scripture’s own liberty, than when we restrain it to our methods of argumentation; and the weapons of Scripture are sharper in their own soft breathings, than when sharpened in the forge of Aristotle.” [John Owen, Works, Vol 1, p LVII].

By “the forge of Aristotle,” Owen meant the practice of mixing

human philosophy with the Scriptures, a practice far, far too common in the churches today. Many of the most “popular” preachers whose scores of books sell in large numbers and who are followed by thousands, preach man-devised psychology in the guise of Bible exposition.

We have already seen the Apostle Paul admonishing the Corinthians for this very thing and reminding them what a true servant of God looks like:

1Co 2:1-5 And I, when I came to you, brothers, did not come proclaiming to you the testimony of God with lofty speech or wisdom. (2) For I decided to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified. (3) And I was with you in weakness and in fear and much trembling, (4) and my speech and my message were not in plausible words of wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power, (5) so that your faith might not rest in the wisdom of men but in the power of God.

Think very, very carefully about Paul's words here. VERY carefully. NEVER be jealous of people in a "big" and "happening" church with a popular, charismatic preacher who, if you listen carefully to his kind, does not really preach God's Word. These type do not begin with "open your Bibles and follow as I read the text before us" and then systematically open up that Scripture so that his message preached is not HIS message, but is a faithful and true exposition of God's Word.

Listen again to another warning against the "wisdom of man" in our dealing with God's Word, as the Apostle Paul calls it. Paul, you will recall reminded us of this vital truth:

1Co 1:18-23 For the word of the cross is folly to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. (19) For it is written, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and the discernment of the discerning I will thwart." (20) 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? (21) For since, in the wisdom of God, the world did not know God through wisdom, it pleased God through the folly of what we preach to save those who believe. (22) For Jews demand signs and Greeks seek wisdom, (23) but we preach Christ crucified, a stumbling block to Jews and folly to Gentiles,

Our faithful preacher, Martyn Lloyd-Jones, also warned us against treating the Bible as if it were a book that any man with human learning and intellect can understand. In a message given on the occasion of the establishment of a Protestant Evangelical College, MLJ told the gathering of pastors:

"Reason is not to be the controlling factor; this is supra-reason, it is above and beyond reason. We must start with *belief* and not with reason and philosophy....Let me emphasize that we are not interested in mere scholarship. That has been, as I have said, the

tragedy of the last hundred years in particular. The men who have been concerned with theological education during the past century remind me forcibly of the Pharisees and scribes of whom our Lord said that they pay tithes of mint, anise, and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law (Matthew 23:23). They have wasted time and energy and wearied the poor students and, in turn, members of congregations, with details of so-called historical and literary criticism, and in quoting authorities; and in the meantime the great principles of the Christian faith have been forgotten. It is not surprising that some of these colleges have been closed and that their premises are being sold. We are concerned here with spiritual knowledge.”

“...to say that a man cannot preach, and cannot even read his Bible if he does not know Greek and Hebrew, I am afraid, must be categorized as sheer nonsense. This is most serious, for it seems to me to show an ignorance of the spiritual character of the biblical message. How anyone who has ever read the

First Epistle to the Corinthians, chapter 2, can make such statements I cannot understand.

We are not in the realm of things natural; these things are spiritually discerned, they are understood in a spiritual manner [ie, by the Holy Spirit]. A man does not understand the Bible simply by knowing Greek or Hebrew [or other forms of human wisdom, such as philosophy or psychology]. He understands the Bible because he has the Spirit of God in him.

1Co 2:8-13 None of the rulers of this age understood this, for if they had, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory. (9) But, as it is written, “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined, what God has prepared for those who love him”— (10) these things God has revealed to us through the Spirit. For the Spirit searches everything, even the depths of God. (11) For who knows a person's thoughts except the spirit of that person, which is in him? So also no one comprehends the thoughts of God except the Spirit of God. (12) Now we have

received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might understand the things freely given us by God. (13) And we impart this in words not taught by human wisdom but taught by the Spirit, interpreting spiritual truths to those who are spiritual.

The key to an understanding of the Bible is not a knowledge of the original languages. You can have such knowledge and still be ignorant of the message, as so many are and have been, unfortunately. It is the man who has a spiritual understanding who understands the Word of God. What preachers need today above everything else is the power of the Spirit illuminating their minds.” [Knowing the Times, Lloyd-Jones, Banner of Truth]

Lest I fail this morning to practice what I am preaching, let me call your attention to Paul’s words in the third chapter, verses 18-23.

1Co 3:18-23 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let

him become a fool that he may become wise. (19) For the wisdom of this world is folly 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 in men. 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 are yours, (23) and you are Christ’s, and Christ is God’s.

Why would a preacher mix the “wisdom of this age” together with God’s Word? What is the motive? *It is an attempt to make the gospel acceptable to men.* But the Bible tells us that man, dead in sin, devoid of the life of God and of the Spirit, *hates God’s Word. The natural man cannot and will not receive God’s truth. He sees it as utter foolishness. The cross is an offense to him. Remove the offense and you destroy the truth and power of the gospel which is the power of God to salvation.* And that is why so many churches are filled with unregenerate people

who think they are on their way to heaven when in fact they are on Broadway which is taking them to hell.

This specific error which produces a false gospel is what Paul is repeatedly warning the Corinthians against. Let's move in here on these verses for a closer look:

1Co 3:18 Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.

Let no one deceive himself. Let's not hurry through Paul's words here. This is a warning which we all must give heed to or Paul would not have given it. *Don't be deceived by yourself!* Don't let your flesh deceive you and you fall prey to pride and arrogance which craves the world's wisdom. Paul warns the Corinthians, and us, repeatedly about this:

1Co 6:9 Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be

deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality,

1Co 15:33 Do not be deceived: "Bad company ruins good morals."

The visible church is filled today with deceivers standing in their pulpits and with others who creep in secretly among the sheep. *As soon as we let our pride operate and we are flattered by things the world calls wisdom, we are on the path to deception.*

"If anyone among you thinks he is wise in this age...." We live in this world, in this *age*, which operates according to a mindset, to a way of thinking, that is absolutely contrary to the wisdom of God. What are some of its platforms?

- Wealth is to be sought after and the person who has it is blessed
- Popularity is to be sought after
- The size of a person's following is a measure of true success

- The size of a person's following authenticates the truth of what they promote
- Truth is relative. If you claim it is absolute, then you are a trouble maker and need to be quiet
- Academia, academic achievement, scholarly learning – these are the keys to success. The university and its degrees are what mark a wise person.
- Store up treasure here in this life and world – be rich in the things of this present world.

These things and more are the deceptions of the world and they deceive prideful people who are wise in the measure of the world's wisdom, or who seek that wisdom. Over the years, the majority of the young people who have grown up here and then have gone off to the university have made shipwreck of their faith. *Don't be deceived, and don't deceive yourself.*

Instead....

“If anyone among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.”

Let him become a fool. That is, let him humble himself and become a fool in the world's measure because he now embraces God's wisdom which is regarded as foolishness to this world.

Following Christ in this world necessarily means that you will be a fool in the eyes of your unsaved family members for instance – just as Christian was when he left the City of Destruction.

Here is Paul's experience, along with his fellow co-laborers, as he served Christ. He contrasts this with the arrogant enjoyments of the Corinthians:

1Co 4:10-13 We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. (11) To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted

and homeless, (12) and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; (13) when slandered, we entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.

And do not miss this – Paul calls upon the Corinthians and US, to *imitate him*. How? By rejecting the world's wisdom and embracing the wisdom of God. What is that wisdom? Here are some of its platforms:

- We will be last in this world, but first in the kingdom of God
- Being wise in God's wisdom will result in the world considering us to be fools
- Success for Christ will result in the world regarding us as failures
- Thinking God's wisdom and acting upon it will not give us popularity with the world
- The scholarly learning of the university in large part is inconsistent with God's

wisdom. The university's explanation of the existence of the world, for instance, is foolishness in God's sight.

- Use the world's goods for the glory of God so as to lay up treasure for yourself in heaven.

These things and more are foolishness to the world, and those who are wise in God's measure will be measured as fools by the world.

Paul was not writing about something that he did not experience himself. When he was Saul of Tarsus, he recalls:

Php 3:7-9 But whatever gain I had, I counted as loss for the sake of Christ. (8) Indeed, I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ (9) and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which

comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith—

Gal 1:13-14 For you have heard of my former life in Judaism, how I persecuted the church of God violently and tried to destroy it. (14) And I was advancing in Judaism beyond many of my own age among my people, so extremely zealous was I for the traditions of my fathers.

Paul was *advancing* in Judaism beyond others in his class. Top of his class. Proud parents. What a career their son had ahead of him!

And then one day on the road, he met Jesus – and everything he was, and all that was wisdom to him, and everything he had valued – was gone. He was regarded as the fool of fools.

Here then is an obvious point at which we must examine ourselves with ruthless honesty? Have YOU met Jesus in a life-changing, mind-altering revelation? So that you realized you had been a fool. So

that your popularity with your friends and the world came to an end, and you were now considered a fool? An outsider? A stranger who had lost your mind?

Or are you just as popular with the old friends and family and world as you always have been? *Has your claim to be a follower of Jesus ever cost you anything at all?* Or perhaps you are clinging to the world's benefits by being ashamed to confess Christ before men? If so, Christ will be ashamed of you on that Day.

Have you ever become a fool for Christ's sake?

Act 17:18-21 Some of the Epicurean and Stoic philosophers also conversed with him. And some said, “**What does this babbler wish to say?**” Others said, “He seems to be a preacher of foreign divinities”—because he was preaching Jesus and the resurrection. (19) And they took him and brought him to the Areopagus, saying, “May we know what this new teaching is that you

are presenting? (20) For you bring some strange things to our ears. We wish to know therefore what these things mean.” (21) Now all the Athenians and the foreigners who lived there would spend their time in nothing except telling or hearing something new.

This *babbler*. And then after he preached Christ to them, most *mocked* Paul. A few, just a few, believed.

Do you understand that there is great *encouragement* here for you if you really are born again? If you have been regarded as a babbler, as a fool, by people you used to be popular with? By family members? By the world, in other words? When the world calls you a fool because of Christ, then it is the worldling who is a fool.

NOTE: The counterfeit “Christian” is revealed to be what he is when you realize that he considers the real Christian to be a fool. It may take a long time, but eventually you, if you really are born again, eventually you will see that

contempt and scorn in the fake sheep for you.

Finally, take careful note that these truths have been taught from Genesis to Revelation. Paul cites two Old Testament Scriptures to prove his point about the wise of this world being fools:

1Co 3:19-20 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, "He is THE ONE WHO CATCHES THE WISE IN THEIR CRAFTINESS";

(20) and again, "THE LORD KNOWS THE REASONINGS of the wise, THAT THEY ARE USELESS."

The first reference is from Job-

Job 5:13 "He captures the wise by their own shrewdness, And the advice of the cunning is quickly thwarted.

And the second is from Psalm 94 –

Psa 94:11 The LORD knows the thoughts of man, That they are a mere breath.

Man in his sin has his mind and understanding *darkened*. As a result, he is incapable of real wisdom. He may have the capacity for great knowledge of facts, he may discover incredible things in nature, *but he can never through these things come to a knowledge of God and of the wisdom of God*. He remains, in other words, a fool and his “deep” reasonings are useless. Let that sink in. USELESS. WORTHLESS.

How would you like to be in a debate with God? That is exactly what the Pharisees and others did – debated and argued with God! They lost of course. Their shrewdness and cunning were exposed as false and foolish and they were tripped up by the very “wisdom” they claimed to have.

The sinner debates and argues with God. He regards himself as wise and thinks he has proven God’s Word to be false. He does not

merely make a mistake on a mathematics examination. No, he tells God that God’s wisdom is false – foolish. This is a double condemnation. To be stupid is one error – but to be so arrogant as to take truth and boast that it is not truth – that your “wisdom” is truth, is the height of arrogant folly.

And so, the conclusion of the matter for the Christian:

1Co 3:21-23 So then let no one boast in men. For all things belong to you, (22) whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or things present or things to come; all things belong to you, (23) and you belong to Christ; and Christ belongs to God.

Let him who boasts, boast in the Lord and in the great salvation we have in Christ.