



AN IMPERFECT LOCAL CHURCH
A Study in 1 Corinthians

Lesson 6, 1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5
CLASS

OUTLINE

1 Corinthians 1:18-4:21, Human vs. divine wisdom

Lesson Outline

1 Corinthians 3:18-4:5, No glory in man's wisdom

- 3:18-20 Let no one deceive himself
- 3:21-23 Let no one glory in men
- 4:1-5 Judging God's servants

An underlying message in all that Paul has written so far is that Christians are God's people. As such, they should not only act differently than does the world, but they should think differently. They should live by different values and by a different evaluation of what is truly important.

Paul had begun by pointing out division in the church expressed by having rival groups who claimed allegiance to various spiritual leaders. He then presented the gospel of Jesus crucified as the ultimate example of God's greater wisdom, a wisdom that was not appreciated by the ways of the world.

Earlier in chapter 3 he again mentioned the favorite personalities, but now returns to his assertion that worldly wisdom is deceptive and divisive, while godly wisdom is redemptive and unifying. If there is any doubt that Paul is still on the same theme, compare the verses below in which statements from chapter 1 find corresponding statements in chapter 3.

1:18-31

- ²⁶ For you see your calling, brethren, that not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, *are called.*
- ²⁷ But God has chosen the foolish things of the world to put to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty;
- ^{20b} Has not God made foolish the wisdom of this world?
- ¹⁹ For it is written: "*I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, And bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.*"
- ³¹ that, as it is written, "*He who glories, let him glory in the LORD.*"

3:18-21a

- ¹⁸ Let no one deceive himself. If anyone among you seems to be wise in this age, let him become a fool that he may become wise.
- ^{19a} For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.
- ^{19b} For it is written, "*He catches the wise in their own craftiness*";
- ²⁰ and again, "*The LORD knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.*"
- ²¹ Therefore let no one glory in men.

DISCUSSION

1 Co 3:18-20, Let no one deceive himself

- 1. What simple and basic ideas that are central to the thought of these early chapters is highlighted in the quotations shown above from Isaiah 29, Jeremiah 9, Job 5 and Psalms 94?**

- 2. What worldly wisdom ideas had been accepted as truth in Job's day as shown in his story? Would anyone following such wisdom have become a follower of Job after tragedy struck (verse 19; Job 5:13)?**

- 3. In what specific area were the Corinthian Christians deceiving themselves? (Compare the imperative statements in verses 18 & 21. In ESV both begin, "let no one.")**

- 4. What kind of wisdom were the Corinthian Christians using? (Hint: It was the kind that divided people.)**

1 Co 3:21-23, Let no one glory in men

- 5. What problem has Paul mentioned so far in the letter that would identify the precise area where they were using this kind of wisdom? What direct statement in this paragraph clearly identifies the same target problem?**

- 6. In what ways do we "glory in men":**
 - a. In the church? Is it wrong then to recognize a good Christian example?**

 - b. Outside the church (in daily life)?**

- 7. What does Paul mean by, "All things are yours" (v. 21), and "all are yours" (v. 22)? What are "all things?" (See 1 Cor 8:6; 11:12; 15:27-28, 57-58. See also Eph 1:3f). What is the relevance to the division in the Corinthian church?**

1 Corinthians 4:1-5, Judging God's servants

- 8. How did Paul want to be considered or regarded by the Corinthian Christians?**

- 9. On what grounds or criteria was Paul (and others) being judged by the Corinthians, thereby leading to their elevation or demotion?**

- 10. Basically, what was a steward's responsibility? Whose opinion of the steward's performance mattered?**

- 11. What is the meaning of "judge" in this instance?**

- 12. Of what value is a clear conscience? Did Paul have a clear conscience about his stewardship, and what limits did he attach to his self-evaluation? (See Romans 14:4; 2 Corinthians 1:12; 2 Timothy 1:3.)**

- 13. Is it conceivable that the Almighty God would actually praise you or me? What does this do to your self-evaluation and self-worth? What does it mean to be praised by God?**