

# ANSWER EIGHT: RENOUNCING SELF-DECEPTION 1 CORINTHIANS 03:18–23

## *Introduction; Worldly Wisdom — Division*

In this passage Paul gives the root cause for the trouble with the Corinthians. It was pride — pride in who they were and in what they knew. Corinth was a centre for intellectual pursuit and culture; and some in the church were glorying in being part of an intellectual, highly educated and cultured society. They professed an intellectual, worldly wisdom; professed to know more than most, and this same attitude was carried over into the church. They professed to understand the Scriptures and the ways of God better than most. They thought themselves wise enough to judge the value of different church leaders. They prided themselves in their ability to judge the truth. They were taking different men and criticizing the way they preached and ministered. They were judging the rhetoric, the persuasiveness of their delivery, the logic of their arguments, the flowery descriptiveness of their sentences. They were judging the ability and the gifts of the men, and if they agreed that the abilities of the men were what the church needed at a particular time, they were cooperative. But if they disagreed, they were separating themselves and pulling little parties around them. They gathered themselves around Paul, Cephas and Apollos; and some, with a spiritual air, just proclaimed that they gathered themselves around Christ.

One of the answers to the problem of divisiveness within the church is for a man to recognize that he has been deceived and to renounce the self-deception.

- I. Watch self-deception (v. 18).
- II. Renounce worldly wisdom (v. 18-20).
- III. Renounce boasting in men (v. 21-23).

## **I. 1 Corinthians 03:18 Self-Deception**

Watch self-deception — “Do not deceive yourselves.” There is a background to this charge that helps the reader understand its importance.

The Corinthian church had some unusual advantages over many of the other churches:

- => They had access to the Scriptures, and they enjoyed the Scriptures and the ways of God.
- => They enjoyed philosophy and theology and were in a great city where both were freely encouraged and openly discussed.
- => They had the privilege of being ministered to by some of the most outstanding preachers, not only of their day, but of history (Paul, Peter, Apollos).
- => They had received an unusual outpouring of the gifts of God’s Spirit (cp. Chapter 12-14).

However, the Corinthian church had a serious problem: the Corinthians wanted worldly recognition. They wanted to be known as intellectual, well-educated and very capable in

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understanding the world and God. They enjoyed thinking through and rationalizing about God and the world, and they took great pride in their ideas and the ideas of their peers.

The result was tragic. They had begun to follow their own ideas and rationalizations and to disregard the will and Word of God. They had begun to exalt their own wisdom and to exalt men with unusual ability. They had begun to govern their lives by their own ideas instead of obeying God's Word. Very simply, they were exalting the wisdom and ideas of men over the wisdom of God, and they were running the risk of destroying both themselves and the church. They were deceiving themselves.

***Luke 18:9** To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable.*

***1 Cor 10:12** So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!*

***Gal 6:3** If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.*

***James 1:22** Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says.*

***Rev 3:17** You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.*

***Prov 28:26** He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe.*

***Hosea 10:13** But you have planted wickedness, you have reaped evil, you have eaten the fruit of deception. Because you have depended on your own strength and on your many warriors.*

## **II. 1 Corinthians 03:18–20 The Wisdom of Men**

Renounce worldly wisdom. Worldly wisdom is natural reason only, it is the wisdom of men that seeks to know the truth of the world and of God by natural reason only. Men readily acknowledge the problem of evil and suffering in the world caused by such things as natural disasters, disease, hunger, selfishness, greed, violence, lust, anger, accidents and prejudice. A few men even give their lives to the task of understanding and conquering the problems of evil and sin in the world. They commit themselves to seek the truth of the world, and in some cases of God, through such fields as science, education, technology and religion. But they fail; they always fail. No matter how much worldly wisdom and efforts are put to these endeavours, man always comes up short in conquering and controlling evil and in discovering God.

The point is this: when a church begins to approach God and the problems of the world through worldly wisdom, the result is tragic. The church is taking a path that will destroy its witness and make it useless in the Kingdom of God. This was the path being chosen by the Corinthian church, and it is the path that is often chosen by too many churches.

Now, why does worldly wisdom fail to grasp the truth of the world and of God? There are three reasons given in this passage. (See Wisdom of the World, 1 Cor. 1:19-20.)

1. Worldly wisdom is superficial: it only seems to be wise. The Greek word dokei means to think. The man thinks himself to be wise and creative, knowledgeable and intelligent. He thinks he has a novel idea or concept of God and truth.

Note: most men think they are fairly wise and knowledgeable in how to handle their lives and affairs. Few think they will be totally unacceptable and rejected by whatever Higher Being there is. Such knowledge and wisdom exists only in the minds of men. It is not true. It is superficial knowledge, worldly wisdom. It only seems to be wise. This is clearly seen in three facts.

- a. Since God is — since God exists — no person can understand the world and God if he leaves God out of the picture. Even an atheist has to admit this: if God truly exists, then man must understand God in order to understand the world which God made. A person just cannot understand the world without understanding God, no matter who he is.
- b. No man has ever seen God, no matter what some men claim. No man has ever left the physical world — the physical dimension of being — and penetrated the spiritual world and seen God and returned to the physical world. This material, corruptible, imperfect world cannot penetrate the spiritual, incorruptible and perfect world. It is totally and absolutely impossible for an imperfect being to see the Perfect Being (God) and live to tell about it. It is totally and absolutely impossible for an imperfect being to penetrate a perfect world. If he did, it would no longer be perfect.

***John 1:18** No one has ever seen God, but God the One and Only, who is at the Father's side, has made him known.*

***John 5:37** "And the Father who sent me has himself testified concerning me. You have never heard his voice nor seen his form."*

***1 Tim 6:16** Who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honour and might forever. Amen.*

***Exo 33:20** But," he said, "you cannot see my face, for no one may see me and live."*

- c. The only way God can ever be known is for God to reveal Himself. The only way the truth of a perfect world can be known is for God to reveal it.

This is the very point of this Scripture. Any wisdom that seeks to know God apart from His revelation is superficial. It is a man who only thinks that he is wise: he is only a worldly wise man; he does not know the real truth.

***Rom 1:22** Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools.*

***Col 2:8** See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ.*

***James 3:15** Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil.*

**Jer 4:22** *“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding. They are skilled in doing evil; they know not how to do good.”*

2. Worldly wisdom is not true wisdom. Note the words, “He should become a ‘fool’ so that he may become wise.” This simply means that a person must become what the world calls “a fool” if he wishes to know God and the real truth of God’s world. The world hears about the revelation of God and calls it foolishness. In the eyes of the world it is utter foolishness...

- to talk about God really existing and loving the world, loving the world so much that He would actually send His Son into the world.
- to talk about the basic problem of the world being the presence of evil and sin within the heart of man instead of education and social improvement.
- to say that God had to take care of the problem of evil by having His Son die upon a cross for the sins of the world.
- to talk about the heart of man having to be changed in order for him to be reconciled to God and live in peace.
- to talk about being saved, born again, made into a new creation, indwelt by the Holy Spirit and resurrected some day.
- to talk about God making a new heavens and earth.

All this is utter foolishness to the world. But note something: all this is exactly what Jesus Christ taught. It is the very revelation of God — the very message that God sent to the world through His Son Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ was the revelation, the Spokesman of God to the world.

**John 3:34** *“For the one whom God has sent speaks the words of God, for God gives the Spirit without limit.”*

**John 8:51** *“I tell you the truth, if anyone keeps my word, he will never see death.”*

**John 12:48** *“There is a judge for the one who rejects me and does not accept my words; that very word which I spoke will condemn him at the last day.”*

**John 14:6** *Jesus answered, “I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.”*

**John 14:24** *“He who does not love me will not obey my teaching. These words you hear are not my own; they belong to the Father who sent me.”*

**John 17:8** *“For I gave them the words you gave me and they accepted them. They knew with certainty that I came from you, and they believed that you sent me.”*

**1 Cor 1:21** *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.*

*1 Cor 1:18 For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*

*1 Cor 1:23-24 But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God.*

*1 Cor 2:1-2 When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

3. Worldly wisdom is foolishness to God (v. 19).
  - a. It is foolishness because evil, selfishness and sin do exist within the heart of man. No matter who the person is, the person's heart has the seed of sin, corruption, aging, deterioration, decay and death in it. All men sin and die. Honesty, reason, experience, sight, feeling and hearing tell us the terrible truth of the fact.
  - b. It is foolishness because there is only one way imaginable that a sinful and imperfect creature could ever be acceptable to a perfect God: the perfect God would have to love the sinful creature so much that He would just accept him. But, even if He loved the sinful creature that much, two things would be necessary.
    - => First, someone would still have to pay the penalty for man's sin. Why? Because God is perfect and righteous and just. If He laid aside and forgot His perfect justice, He would then become unjust and imperfect. It would be acting against His nature. Therefore, God's justice has to act and condemn man's sin.
    - => Second, a perfect Being would have to take man's sin upon Himself and die for man. Why a perfect Being? Because no sinful creature is acceptable to God. The only Person acceptable to God is the Ideal, Perfect Person. Therefore, whoever sacrificed Himself for sinful man would have to be the Ideal, Perfect Person.

Of course, this means that only God Himself could pay the penalty for man's sin. And that is exactly what He did. God came to earth in the person of His Son and revealed the truth to man, and then died for man.

Now, note the wisdom of what God has done: the love and justice of sending His Son into the world to save man. Note that this is the only conceivable way man could be saved when dealing...

- with God who is perfect and man who is imperfect.
- with heaven which is the incorruptible spiritual world, and earth which is the corruptible physical world.
- with how sinful man can approach a perfectly holy God.
- with how a perfectly holy God could accept an unholy man.
- with how a perfect and loving God could save an imperfect and rebellious man.

This is the reason that all approaches to God other than through His Son Jesus Christ are foolishness to Him. This is the reason the Scriptures proclaim that God “catches the wise in their craftiness,” and “the Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise, are futile [empty].” He knows the thoughts of every man, the utter emptiness of man’s worldly approach to understanding the truth of God and the world.

**John 3:16-17** *“For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him.”*

**Rom 5:8** *But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*

**2 Cor 5:19, 21** *That God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting men’s sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation... God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.*

**1 Pet 2:24** *He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.*

**1 Pet 3:18** *For Christ died for sins once for all, the righteous for the unrighteous, to bring you to God. He was put to death in the body but made alive by the Spirit.*

**1 Cor 1:18-19** *For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. For it is written: “I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate.”*

**1 Cor 1:21** *For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.*

**1 Cor 1:23-25** *But we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. For the foolishness of God is wiser than man’s wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than man’s strength.*

**1 Cor 2:1-2** *When I came to you, brothers, I did not come with eloquence or superior wisdom as I proclaimed to you the testimony about God. For I resolved to know nothing while I was with you except Jesus Christ and him crucified.*

**1 Cor 2:6-7** *We do, however, speak a message of wisdom among the mature, but not the wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. No, we speak of God’s secret wisdom, a wisdom that has been hidden and that God destined for our glory before time began.*

**1 Cor 2:9-10** *However, as it is written: “No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him” — But God has revealed it to us by his Spirit. The Spirit searches all things, even the deep things of God.*

### III. *1 Corinthians 03:21–23 Renounce Boasting*

Renounce boasting in men. This is a crucial point for believers to heed. To boast in men means to trust men, to look upon men as the answer and source of life and blessing.

This is just too much trust, too much confidence to put in men. Some men can and should be trusted, but even they are not the answer and source of life and true blessing. They should not be glorified. The believer is to boast only in God. Only God is to be exalted and praised and worshipped.

However, there are two other reasons why believers are not to boast in men - two extremely important reasons.

1. All things belong to the believer. The believer actually possesses all things, and to boast in any other man is to minimize his own dignity and exalted position.
  - a. Preachers, no matter who they are, belong to the believers. All preachers exist to serve and minister and meet the needs of God's people. If a church or a believer takes advantage of only a few preachers or of only one or two types of preachers, the church and the believer are limiting their chances to be enriched and blessed. They are limiting their growth.
  - b. The world, the physical universe, belongs to believers. God is going to remake the universe, that is, the heavens and the earth; and believers are to inherit it all, ruling and administering the functions of it all with Christ Jesus. (See Rewards, 1 Cor. 3:13-15. Read 2 Pet. 3:3-4, 7-16 for a descriptive picture of the end time event, an event clearly understandable in light of the atom and its explosive power. While reading, remember that this event was revealed to the world just a few years after the ascension of Jesus.)
  - c. Life belongs to the believers. This means real life, abundant life — a life with purpose, meaning and significance — a life that triumphs and gains the victory over the trials and sufferings of this life.

*John 10:10* "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

*2 Cor 9:8* And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.

*Eph 3:20* Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us.

*Phil 4:19* And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus.

- d. Death belongs to the believers. That is, death has no sway or hold over the believers, but contrariwise, the believer holds death in his grip through the Lord Jesus Christ. Death has been conquered by Christ.

**John 3:16** “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.”

**John 5:24** “I tell you the truth, whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has crossed over from death to life.”

**John 11:25-26** Jesus said to her, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in me will live, even though he dies; and whoever lives and believes in me will never die. Do you believe this?”

**2 Pet 1:11** And you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

- e. Present and future things belong to the believers. The believer is the heir of the world, the heir of God Himself.

**Rom 4:13** It was not through law that Abraham and his offspring received the promise that he would be heir of the world, but through the righteousness that comes by faith.

**Rom 8:16-17** The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children. Now if we are children, then we are heirs — heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory.

**Titus 3:7** So that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs having the hope of eternal life.

**1 Pet 1:3-4** Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! In his great mercy he has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, And into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade — kept in heaven for you.

2. Believers belong to Christ, and Christ belongs to God. Three points need to be noted.
- Believers possess all things only because of Christ — only because of what He has done for them. Without Christ they have no more than what the world has: an existence of pressure, tension, questioning, wondering, apprehension, uncertainty, insecurity about the future and sure death.
  - Believers owe their lives to Christ, not to any man, even if he happens to be the most spiritual and the greatest preacher and leader to walk across the face of the earth. Believers are not to live carnal lives, following after and glorying in men, no matter their wisdom, intelligence and ability — not even if they have the greatest spiritual gifts ever possessed by men. “You are of Christ” is the proclamation to believers.
  - “Christ is of God.” This does not mean that Christ is not divine, that He is less than God. It refers to His function and ministry as Saviour. He came to earth to save men in subjection to God’s will. Both God the Son and God the Father willed for Jesus Christ to subject Himself to God the Father and to come to earth as a Man in order to save the world. As the Saviour of the world, Jesus Christ served God; therefore,



He too, as our Saviour, was obedient to God. “Christ is of God” in the sense that He obeyed God as our Saviour. They both love us with a supreme, perfect love — a love unimaginable and unsurpassed.

⇒ “So then, no more boasting about men!” (v. 21).

*John 5:44* “How can you believe if you accept praise from one another, yet make no effort to obtain the praise that comes from the only God?”

*Rom 12:16* Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

*1 Cor 8:2* The man who thinks he knows something does not yet know as he ought to know.

*1 Pet 1:24* For, “All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall.”

*Psa 10:3* He boasts of the cravings of his heart; he blesses the greedy and reviles the Lord.

*Psa 49:12* But man, despite his riches, does not endure; he is like the beasts that perish.

*Psa 49:17* For he will take nothing with him when he dies, his splendour will not descend with him. ■