

A Future as Bright as the Promises of God

1 Corinthians 3:16-23

I want us to come back to a couple themes that emerged over the past few weeks—saints together *and* the Spirit's work in our imagination—so that we can better grasp and apply them. Here's my main point this morning, *a maturing church will promote holy unity by embracing a new authority which results in a re-imagined community.*

Holy Unity

People's visions of church differ. When I first moved to Austin I asked people what they thought about church and if Austin needed another one. Some said only if it did good. Others said no way; we've got enough bigots. Christians are also divided on their visions of church: more community, better music, less preaching, more social justice...Paul trifles with our visions of church when he says: "**Do you not know that you are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in you? God's temple is holy, and you are that temple**" (1 Co 3:16). A collective holiness is at the center of his vision. The temple was a fixture of 1st century life, as far as the eye could see. What took place in temples? Worship. Worshippers went to temples to be set apart—holy if you will—to a particular deity. In the temple, the worshipper would go to the god to obtain fertility, crops, whatever. The aim was to meet the god and submit to it. Paul takes this cultural idea and turns it on its head. **Instead of going to the temple to find the god, in Christianity, the god comes to the people to form the temple:** to make us *holy together*. His agenda is greater than crops and deeper than works. Through his presence among us, he is resetting us to our original purpose *to live as a holy community*. Implications are big. This means to be united with Christ is to be joined to the church. Paul can't conceive of a disembodied Christ, of stray Christians disconnected from one another. Which means loving Jesus but not the church severs the head from the body. Christians who complain about the church, gossip, judge, and quarrel are like cutters, who cause self-injury to the Body. So if your vision of church doesn't include being holy together, which builds up the body, then it's not God's church. The unfortunate reality at Corinth was people were acting like *individuals apart* instead of saints together. City Life is not immune to this. We all possess alternate, broken views of church. If you have church background, you can name off the things you don't like about your church experience, probably more than the benefits. Why? **Because you care more about your views on the church than embodying God's view of the church**—holy temple, where his Spirit dwells, where people live who are just as deserving of forgiveness and grace as you are *because of Christ*. Now, there has been an extraordinary transformation of old views in City Life, around gospel, community, and mission. Wonderful stuff. But we would be naive to think that our old, individualistic, default visions have dissipated. This concern is the whole reason Paul wrote the letter (1:10-17, 3:1-23), *and* we are kidding ourselves if we don't think disunity is also a real threat to us. We divide the church when we attend only when our preferred preacher is speaking, or just catching the podcast at home, or not pursuing the holy joy of others in your city group, or by forming judgmental opinions on the style of music, personality of a leader. When we dwell on minors instead of majoring on Christ crucified we act like "Individuals Apart" not saints together. We build a vision of church around ourselves, not Jesus.

New Authority

Why do we do this? According to Paul, the fundamental obstacle to embodying this vision of saints together is our lack of wisdom: “[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. For the wisdom of this world is folly with God.](#)” He’s connecting the temple vision of the church to the wisdom of God. Why? Because he knows we form false temples where we are enamored with the presence of Self (not God) and the authority of our views/wisdom (not his). In response, he says you have to become a fool before you can become wise. You have to lay down your views and take up My views, your authority and take up My authority. The way forward into his vision of the church is to submit to a **new authority** (God) who possesses a greater wisdom (revelation through the Spirit). Now, this is very difficult for modern people who are used to controlling their lives, their cars, their bank accounts, their notifications. It is offensive to self-reliant, rationalistic people, but the funny thing is that we accept this all the time. Whenever you accept a new job, you willingly submit yourself to a new authority (your boss) and wisdom (her way of doing things). Now you might take the job and over time conclude you actually know better than your boss, but that’s exactly my point—we resist a new authority and better wisdom *when it comes from God*. Why? There are a lot of layers to this, but deep down we must believe that our new boss can give us something God can’t, and therefore she is wiser than God. Or that we can find a better way to live, outside of God’s wisdom. This is why Paul cites a comment from Eliphaz, friend to Job (Job 5): “[For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness.”](#) Our wisdom, our way is in direct opposition to God’s wisdom and God’s way. So God sees right through our petty views and self-serving wisdom. But he goes on to remark that God does “[marvelous things without number.](#)” That’s innumerable marvelous things, so many good things you can’t even count them. That’s the kind of authority we are talking about, way beyond the best person you know. He continues by saying that God is also beyond comprehension, “[unsearchable.](#)” The word means inscrutable, beyond total grasp. He is now adding to God’s immeasurable goodness, and inexhaustible power and greatness. He is infinitely good, and endlessly great. Bring them together and we have a God who is knowable but not comprehensible. And we know him through the Holy Spirit. In chapter 2, Paul put it like this: “[no one knows the thoughts of God...except the Spirit of God](#)” 2:11. This, of course, is precisely what the Spirit does. Barth put it this way: “[God is known through God alone.](#)” He shows us God by searching out all things, even the depths of God, and discloses all the things freely given to us. So there are depths to God that only the Spirit knows and some of those things are freely given to us. In context, Paul is citing Isaiah 64 where Yahweh and his Spirit are called Redeemer of the people of God. So, the things we know about God through the Spirit are his redemptive works towards us in Christ. This makes the all-powerful and all-good God of tremendous benefit to us in Christ. We would be crazy not to trust him. He is all good and all powerful towards those who hope in him. So why does Paul pull Job in? **He is essentially saying that God is incredibly good and infinitely powerful (a new and better authority)**. And we would be foolish not to trust him. It humbles you to the point of a pinprick in the sphere of time, and you realize there is a vast stretch between you and God. You realize your finitude, sinfulness, and insufficiency in being who God has made you to be. And God comes to us as Christ crucified and risen. Here’s the point—**it is impossible**

to live a saints together when we actually live under our own authority as individuals apart. You have to make up your mind, and orient your heart, to a new and better authority. A Christian is someone who has come to the conclusion that they do not possess enough wisdom or authority to determine the right way to live, and that they need an outside authority to show them how to live. That's wisdom—submission to God's words and God's Spirit.

Re-imagined Community

Because the Lord offers greater wisdom and a new authority, it should dramatically affect how we envision who we are and how we act in the world. Instead of boasting in preferred preachers, authors, and men, he says: "[So let no one boast in men.](#)" Why? "[For all things are yours...](#)" What does that mean. Like a good missionary, Paul is choosing a phrase right out of the culture. The Stoic and Cynic philosophers of the day were known for this saying "*The wise man possesses all things.*" What did they mean? If you devote yourself to the life of the mind, particularly philosophy, you can rule the world so to speak, which actually happened in Rome where philosophers were advisors to caesars. But Paul is turning the phrase on its head, again. He's saying don't boast in men, reason, or philosophy because all things are yours. Why? *Precisely because you have acknowledged a greater authority and wisdom.* The five tyrannies of life: [the world or life or death or the present or the future](#) are overcome in Christ. Here's how. The state of **world** affairs need not create despair because God will judge evil, nor should it create resignation because God will remake the world. Don't fear the headlines; fear God. Enjoy culture, but don't hang your identity on it. **Life and death?** God has those too—1 Cor 15 promises that Christ will destroy death and give us resurrection bodies. So, don't worry about when or how you will die because in Christ you truly live, forever. Care for your body, but not too much. Care for others, but don't worship their bodies. Keep your eyes on the one who satisfies the body *and* the soul. **Present and future?** He's got that too. In fact the future of a new creation overlaps in the present world to make the church an entirely unique people. We can live in hopeful, radical self-sacrifice because, well, he's got the whole world in his hands. We can forgo downtime, entertainment to serve the poor in low apartment communities because our true rest and satisfaction doesn't come from the present. Why? Because our happiness transcends the present, comes from the future, outside of time in the presence of the Lord where there is fullness of joy. So, all things are ours, not because we are scientific rationalists (or philosophers) who rule the world. All things are ours *because we are Christ's.* We have everything not because of self-sufficiency but because of Christ's sufficiency. We ride his coattails so to speak. We [are Christ's, and Christ is God's.](#) We have a greater authority. Paul had tremendous trust in the God disclosed through Scripture. There he encountered the God keeps his promises, offers the wisest way to live, and always gives a word of grace. When missionary to Burma, Adoniram Judson, was hanging upside-down tortured for his faith, human waste rolling down his back, he was asked what he thought about his future. He responded: "[The future is as bright as the promises of God.](#)" Without this God, and his promises, the future is not bright. But with this God, we have every reason to trust him with every thing in our lives: our suffering, our sexuality, our marriage, our children, our vocation, our finances, our church community. We will live in hope, faith, and love,



reimagining who we are and how we live, as saints together, promoting holy unity, under a new authority, as God's new community.