

8. Becoming a wise fool

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Human ingenuity is quite remarkable. Yet it cannot be compared with the wisdom of God. If you've read the Bible, you know a well-known incident: Noah's flood.

The Lord told Noah to build a three-level barge half the length of the Queen Mary, larger in area than twenty basketball courts, and as high as a four-story apartment building according to Genesis chapter 16. And God commanded him to build it hundreds of miles away from any body of water deep enough to sustain it, not to mention that there was no such a thing as "Rain" at that time. Then it took Noah 120 years to complete the ship. Can you imagine the flak he must have endured? And yet, when the appointed day of judgment came, the jeers were drowned in torrential rains and floods. Only Noah, his family, and the animals he had loaded onto the ark were spared. Their faith in God's foolishness led to their deliverance.

We are living in the world that glorifies wealth, health, and intelligence. Unfortunately, the Christian churches are not far from their paths. Whatever happens in the world, eventually seeps into the churches and contaminates what the Lord teaches us to follow because there are so many shallow Christians who want to follow the world rather than what the Lord shows us in the Bible. With that in mind, let me say this from the beginning, it is perfectly great to become a fool for Christ. Let me show you how to become a wise fool for the Lord from the Bible. I see five steps:

A. STAY HUMBLE AND KEEP LEARNING

1 Corinthians 3:18-20 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. 19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. 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."

These Corinthians were self-deceived. For whatever goofy reasons, they thought that they knew it all. They were altogether wise and smart in their own eyes. Much like king Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon:

Daniel 4:28-33 All this came upon King Nebuchadnezzar. 29 At the end of the twelve months he was walking about the royal palace of Babylon. 30 The king spoke, saying, "Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honor of my majesty?" 31 While the word was still in the king's mouth, a voice fell from heaven: "King Nebuchadnezzar, to you it is spoken: the kingdom has departed from you! 32 And they shall drive you from men, and your dwelling shall be with the beasts of the field. They shall make you eat grass like oxen; and seven times shall pass over you, until you know that the Most High rules in the kingdom of men, and gives it to whomever He chooses." 33 That very hour the word was fulfilled concerning Nebuchadnezzar; he was driven from men and ate grass like oxen; his body was wet with the dew of heaven till his hair had grown like eagles' feathers and his nails like birds' claws.

Grant that the Lord doesn't deal with the 21st century people on the spot like He did with Nebuchadnezzar. If that is the case, we would have many animal-looking people roaming around, including many of us.

In v19 and 20, the Lord gives His appraisal of the worldly wisdom – foolishness, craftiness, and futile. Please don't think that our God is against being smart. The

worldly intellectuals despise humility. They would do anything to brag about what they have and what they can do. But the Lord doesn't look for someone who can show off what they can do or have, rather, someone who completely relies on Him with humility.

There is something in true humility that prompts the grace and mercy of God and there is something in pride and haughtiness that prompts His resistance and displeasure. Humility isn't necessarily a low opinion of self. It is a combination of accurate opinion of self and simple self-forgetfulness. Humility is others centered, not self centered.

B. DON'T IDOLIZE OTHER PEOPLE

1 Corinthians 3:21-23 Therefore 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 things present or things to come—all are yours. 23 And you are Christ's, and Christ is God's.

1 Corinthians 4:1 Let a man so consider us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God.

Idolizing someone comes from immaturity. And it will lead people to horrible disappointment. Any so-called idol is sure to fall from its elevated pedestal. Additionally, people worship will limit our perspective of God.

This brings an important and critical issue in our American Christian culture – Christian celebrity. There are many mega-churches in the US that have their satellite campuses in neighboring areas. It is a big fad among the mega-church pastors. I guess it is a bragging right, if you will, under the pretense of “reaching out.” But in reality, it is building one's empire.

Instead of raising someone who is called by the Lord and equip that person and send out that person to start a church, they'd rather set up a location with a giant TV screen so that the same pastor can be at the multiple locations. You may say, “What's wrong with that idea? He is using the modern technology to reach out to many people.” I don't have a problem with using the modern technology, but I have a problem with any pastor who thinks that he is so important that no one can teach like himself, consequently he feels that he has to be everywhere. It is nothing more than a Christian celebrity mentality. Then, people who are around that pastor practically set him up on a pedestal and they give an opportunity for spiritually immature people to follow, and even cling to these pastors' words more than the Bible. There is a Greek word for that stupid concept – HOGWASH.

The apostle Paul teaches us how we are supposed to treat those whom we respect – Fellow servants and stewards of the mysteries of God in chapter 4 verse 1.

The Greek word for “servant” is “hyperetes”, not the more common NT word for a servant “doulos” which designated a common slave. The word “hyperetas” literally means an “under-rower,” in the sense that someone is a rower on a huge Roman ship. So, though it is not the most lowly word for a servant, it certainly is not a prestigious position. This “under-rower” as “one who acts under direction, and asks no questions, one who does the thing he is appointed to do without hesitation, and one who reports only to the One who is over him.

Then Paul explained the image of the steward. A steward is a servant who manages everything for his master, but who himself owns nothing. The church is the “house-

hold of faith", and the ministers are stewards who share God's wealth with the family. Paul called this spiritual wealth "the mysteries of God." We learned this important word "mystery" in 1 Corinthians 2:7 that should be translated "secret" more than "mystery."

The responsibility of the steward is to be faithful to his master. A steward may not please the members of the household; he may not even please some of the other servants; but if he pleases his own master, he is a good steward. This same idea is expressed in Romans 14:

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand.

C. EXERCISE FAITHFULNESS

1 Corinthians 4:2 Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful.

Listen to me, my brothers and sisters. Our God is not nearly as concerned with fruitfulness as He is with our faithfulness. Faithfulness is what He honors. And it is what daily brings us back to the foot of His throne to ask, "Lord, how can I serve you?"

Many of you are involved in the ministries in our church as well as outside of the church. God bless you for your servant heart. But let me ask you to ask yourself this question: "Am I serving the Lord because it is my way to show my love for Him or am I involved with this ministry because it gives me some sort of fulfillment and it is something I am supposed to do in the church?"

Please try to forget about being fruitful in the ministry for a while. Don't be preoccupied with counting your spiritual fruits, rather spend some time in watering your own spiritual roots by just spending time with Him in His Word first, then serve Him. The spiritual fruitfulness will happen naturally if you let His living water soak into the depths of your soul.

D. DO NOT BE OVERLY CONCERNED ABOUT WHAT OTHERS SAY ABOUT YOU

1 Corinthians 4:3-4a But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. 4 For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this

Everyone's a critic and everyone has two cents. It is so much easier to criticize someone or something than we actually do it, agree? After we criticize someone for doing a particular thing in the way he did, if we get to do it, we might even do it in the exact same way.

Even our estimation of ourselves is usually wrong. We are almost always too hard or too easy on ourselves. There can be a fine line between a clear conscience and a self-righteous attitude, so we must beware. Paul recognizes this, and so will discard judgment, even upon himself. In the end, He who judges me is the Lord. When Jesus judges, it will be according to the motives of the heart, not only the outward action or the result.

About 10 some years ago, a group of pastors made a movement, known as "Seeker Sensitive Movement" – they wanted to have their churches more appealing to unbelievers and backsliders. So, they started to teach the water-down gospels instead of

the truth from the Bible. Churches in Christ Jesus must represent who Christ is without any compromise. When we do that, we will be criticized and judged as mean and narrow-minded, but we won't be judged by the Lord.

E. IT IS THE LORD WHO JUDGES US, NOT PEOPLE

1 Corinthians 4:4b-6 but He who judges me is the Lord. 5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord comes, who will both bring to light the hidden things of darkness and reveal the counsels of the hearts. Then each one's praise will come from God. 6 Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other.

No human can judge others completely fairly and objectively. First, we have our own opinion regarding issues, persons, and outcomes. Second, we don't know every little detail that leads to each situation. The Corinthians who were passing judgment on Paul were actually "playing God" and assuming to themselves the privileges that only God has. But our Lord who knows all things can because He judges according to His omniscient knowledge.

However, do not entertain a thought that we cannot judge others within the body of Christ. The local church is a family, and members of the family must help each other to grow. There is a place for honest, loving criticism. If the critic is right, then he has helped us. If he is wrong, then we can help him. Either way, the truth is strengthened.

Please notice Paul's threefold rebuke:

1) Judge nothing before the time – v5

It is when the Lord returns that He will evaluate their lives and ministries, so wait until then. In fact, you cannot see into men's hearts; you cannot begin to judge their motives. Only God can do that.

2) You may learn in us not to think beyond what is written – v6a

The Corinthians were measuring different men by their own personal preferences and prejudices. They were even comparing ministers with one another. The only true basis for evaluation is "what is written" in the Word of God. The Bible clearly reveals what kind of life and service is required of God's ministers. There is no need for us to come up with new standards.

3) You may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other – v6b

Each group in the church was tearing down the other preachers in order to build up the man they liked in this Corinthian church. Their motive was not at all spiritual. God's servants are stewards of His truth, and the key test is, "Have they been faithful to obey and to teach the Word of God?" Not just faithful preaching, but faithful practicing as well.

F. APPLICATIONS

1) Humility is others centered, not self centered.

2) Our God is not nearly as concerned with fruitfulness as He is with our faithfulness. Faithfulness is what He honors.

3) When Jesus judges, it will be according to the motives of the heart, not only the outward action or the result.