

Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? ¹⁷ If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple. ¹⁸ Do not deceive yourselves. If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a "fool" so that he may become wise. ¹⁹ For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. As it is written: "He catches the wise in their craftiness"; ²⁰ and again, "The Lord knows that the thoughts of the wise are futile." ²¹ So then, no more boasting about men! 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 of Christ, and Christ is of God. (1 Corinthians 3:16-23)

Everything is Already Yours!

Have you ever felt cheated? Right after we got married, my wife and I went to Mexico City. The number one thing we wanted to see was an Aztec temple complex called Teotihuacan. We hired a guide to take us there. After a while, he told us we had seen everything – but he lied. In fact, we missed one of the biggest sights there. We didn't know that until later, when we were looking at a brochure and saw pictures and a map. I felt so cheated that fifteen years later, I'm still telling you about it! Have you ever felt cheated? This morning, the Apostle Paul addresses that feeling. He's not talking about vacation disasters. He's not talking about buying a washer that dies the day after its warranty expires. He's talking about our life and our destiny. He sums up his whole point with a striking statement: **everything is already yours!**

I.

Paul wrote this letter to the church in Corinth. That congregation had every problem you can think of. It had cliques. It had doctrinal problems. It had problems with people living openly sinful lives. They had disorder in their worship services and in their meetings. In the middle of a spiritual disaster, Paul told them what he tells us today: **Everything is already yours because you are the temple of the Holy Spirit.**

In the verses before our reading, Paul said that no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Christ. God laid the foundation for our faith. The foundation is Jesus and all that he has done for us. For most of us, he laid that foundation in our baptism. When we were babies, God reached out from heaven and worked through the word connected to the water and he gave us faith.

But our life didn't end at our baptism. That means our faith didn't end then either. We need to continue to grow. To make that happen, God calls people like me to work with you. In those verses before our reading, Paul speaks of ministers building on the foundation. That leads Paul to our reading for today. He says, **"Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit lives in you? If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy him; for God's temple is sacred, and you are that temple."** You are God's temple. If I build on you with crummy materials that don't survive Judgment Day, then I have destroyed that temple. I have wasted the foundation God laid.

How could I ever do that? Well, what am I feeding you when you come here? We live in a society that loves "feel good" religion. People don't like to hear that we're sinners. But the law of God is designed to drive us to Christ by exposing our sin. It's designed to make us feel bad, to make us long for forgiveness. Certainly, I need to always ask myself if I'm preaching the gospel clearly enough so that you take comfort in the love of God and the payment of our Savior. But "feel good" religion is worthless. Faith is not about "self esteem." It's about knowing where you stand with God because Christ has stood in your place.

Is that what you want? Or do you have to admit that you prefer the feel good religion that you find on TV and the radio and in Christian music today? Do you hate it when I tell you that you're a sinner? It's my job to stick the knife of the law into your heart, to force you to see the sin in your desire for a different kind of preaching. But God loves you. Sticking the knife in is just the beginning. God called me to tell you that Jesus paid even for our sinful desire for something else. God has forgiven you and set you free.

God went to the trouble of finding you, out of all the billions of people on earth, and baptizing you. He laid the foundation. And then he established the ministry to build on that foundation. Today is a minor festival of the church year that celebrates the ministry of Peter and Paul. God called them and all the rest of the apostles for us. Two thousand years ago, God knew us by name. He knew the exact moment when we would be born

and the exact time and place where we would come to faith. Before time began, God chose us to believe in him. He arranged all things so that we would hear that gospel and believe in Jesus, our Savior.

So preaching and preachers are God's gift to you. But in a sinful world, there's always a danger that a false teacher will destroy the faith of believers. So God warns you to pay attention to what guys like me say. This robe, this stole, the diplomas hanging in my office don't make me a pastor. God's call does. If I'm unfaithful to his call, then you should get rid of me. But God also put another safeguard in place. God loves you so much that he warns me and every pastor that if we destroy your faith, we'll pay for it.

God issues that warning that because you are the temple of the Holy Spirit. What does that mean? It means that you believe. The Holy Spirit lives in the heart of every believer. Until God gives us faith, we're dead. Have you ever seen an insect trapped inside a piece of amber? The insect looks as if it were alive. But it's totally dead. That's what we humans are like without Christ. We look alive. We walk. We talk. We maybe even seem "spiritual" in the sense that our society uses that word today. But until we have faith in Christ, we're dead. When God came in baptism, when God came in the word that we heard, the Holy Spirit made us alive in Christ. Because he lives in us, we'll live forever.

And the Spirit in our hearts changes our lives here. Now, that does not mean that we speak in tongues or do miracles, like healing the sick and handling snakes. But the Holy Spirit lives in us and we now have a new man who loves the Lord and wants to live like a Christian. We have a believer, who takes comfort in God's love in all the hardships of this life. We trust that God loves us, even if we don't understand why we have to suffer disappointment. We trust that we're never really cheated here, because Jesus is caring for us. That's faith. That change comes in our attitude and in our lives because the Holy Spirit lives in us. He lives in us through the gospel, through the word and baptism and communion, because that gospel give us faith and keeps our faith alive.

II.

That change leads St. Paul to say, "**Do not deceive yourselves.**" Do we do that? I mean, lying to others is one thing. It's wrong, but it happens. But do we really lie to ourselves? Yes, we do. Those lies lead us to think that we need things we don't need and that the things we already have don't matter. But God teaches us to think differently! **Everything is already yours because you have true wisdom.**

Paul says, "**If any one of you thinks he is wise by the standards of this age, he should become a 'fool' so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight.**" What would it mean to be wise by the standards of this age? I was talking to someone last week about the American car industry. They had piles of money and consumer loyalty in the 1970's when Toyotas were a joke. But they squandered that advantage. They were not wise. A wise businessman understands how the market works and he steers his company so that he's always one step ahead of his rivals. He makes money. A wise homeowner does things that enhance the value of his home, rather than letting it go to ruin. Someone who never puts money into his house is being foolish. To be wise according to the standards of this age, you have to be wired in to how people think and then act accordingly. Today, that usually means being nimble and streamlined. It means being ahead of the curve and thinking outside the box and all the other trite little expressions we throw around.

But St. Paul says that the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God's sight. Do you know why? Because it's totally focused on this life. Because it's wired in to what this unbelieving society thinks. The more we're connected to the unbelief of the world around us, the more foolish we are in God's sight. Conversely, the more we are wise by God's standards, the more foolish the world around us thinks we are. To be a Christian means that we love God first of all – more even than we love our families. In this age of "family values" that sounds fanatical. How could God want me to love him more than I love my mother? How could God want me to stay in a church that tells my wife she can't commune? How could God want me to tell homosexuals that they can't get married and that their relationship is wrong? The wisdom of our time doesn't get God's wisdom.

The wisdom of our world says that so you have much money coming in. You have to pay your house payment and your utilities and your car payment. You have to buy clothes and food for your family. You have to put money away for the kids' college and your retirement. You owe yourself a few extras, like cable TV and Wii systems and stuff like that. Every dollar you give to church is a dollar you don't have to spend on those things. But the wisdom of God says forget the math. Trust that God who sent his Son for you loves you enough to take care of you. Trust that God knows better than you do whether you need a Wii system. God

promises that if you bring a generous offering to him, he will bless you. He promises that if he denies you things in this life, he's doing it for your good. How do you know that's true? Just look at the cross and the empty tomb. That was God's own Son dying for you. If God loved you that much, you can trust he will do all things for your eternal good.

That is God's wisdom. The more we follow the wisdom of this world, the farther we get from God. The father we get from contentment even in this life. How much money will it really take to be happy? How new does your car have to be? How big does your house have to be? Did your parents have all that stuff? Are you more content than they were? Or can you look at your own life and testify that Paul was right when he said: **"He catches the wise in their craftiness"** because all that human wisdom hasn't really made you happy?

The Bible teaches us that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. That faith that we've been talking about this morning is true wisdom, and that's especially true when it seems like being a Christian means that we're losing out on all the good things this life have to offer! Paul says, **"All things are yours."** It doesn't look that way right now. But God says it, so it must be true. How can it be? Because we belong to Christ. And Christ is the Son of God. When he comes back, everything from this life will end. But we will live and reign with him over a new and perfect world. The beauty of it is that at that time, we won't have any sin anymore, so we will finally use all of God's gifts with perfect wisdom.

Already now, Paul says, **"All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours..."** Even the ministry is yours. The apostles that God sent to found the church, he sent for you. Every pastor who has ever served here, God sent for you. Whether the world sees it or not, we are God's children and heirs. All that God does in this world, he does for you and me. Everything that happens here, happens for our benefit. But the proof of that is not found in weighing the good and bad and seeing if we come out ahead right now. It often looks like we don't. The proof is Jesus dying and rising for you. When you know that the almighty Son of God, the ruler and owner of the universe, did that for you, then you understand that everything really is yours.

My wife and I may never go back to Teotihuacan. That's just one of the times in our lives when we've felt cheated. But no matter how much our hearts tell us that we're being cheated in this life, we're not. No matter how much you and I struggle with our feelings about our congregation, with our frustration over what we do and don't have in this life, God says, **"All things are yours, whether Paul or Apollos or Cephas or the world or life or death or the present or the future—all are yours, and you are of Christ, and Christ is of God."** Amen.