

The Book of 1 Corinthians
1 Corinthians 3:19-23
Session 16: What is Yours

Let's begin by reading the entire passage.

1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.²⁰ And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.²¹ Therefore let no man glory 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 ye are Christ's; and Christ *is* God's.

When Paul is talking about “the wisdom of this world” he is not talking about the developed ability to medically treat injuries, or build a house, or engineer a bridge or any of those kinds of things. He is talking about the wisdom of the world as it produces a worldview, in having a life philosophy, in the principles which guide the way we live our life, in our attitude and thinking toward circumstances, people and God. In these things, the world always gets it wrong and therefore, the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

In 1 Corinthians 3:19-20, we have citations from Job 5:12-13 and Psalm 94:11 which emphasize the fact that human wisdom is going to come under the judgment of God. Let's start with vs. 19.

1 Corinthians 3:19 For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, **He taketh the wise in their own craftiness.**

Job 5:12 He disappointeth the devices of the crafty, so that their hands cannot perform *their* enterprise.¹³ **He taketh the wise in their own craftiness:** and the counsel of the froward is carried headlong.

What does it mean to “take the wise in their own craftiness?” It means that God catches them with their own schemes and ambitions. It means God will use their wisdom against them so that their schemes produce their own undoing.

Now, take a look at vs. 20.

1 Corinthians 3:20 And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

Psalm 94:11 The LORD knoweth the thoughts of man, that they *are* vanity.

Now take a look at vs. 21.

1 Corinthians 3:21 **Therefore let no man glory in men.** For all things are yours;

We don't glory in men, we glory in God. Why? Paul is going to say, "For all things are yours." What does he mean by that? Before we answer that question, let's get our bearings in the context.

In vv. 3:21-23, Paul recalls the names we saw back in I Corinthians 1:12 and 3:4. Let's read it.

1 Corinthians 3:21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;²²
Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas...

Now, compare that with what came before in this epistle.

1 Corinthians 1:12 Now this I say, that every one of you saith, **I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.**

1 Corinthians 3:4 For while one saith, **I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos;** are ye not carnal?

While the Corinthians were choosing which teacher they belonged to, Paul turns it on its head by saying you don't belong to them, they belong to you. This puts the teachers in their proper role as servants.

1 Corinthians 3:21 Therefore let no man glory in men. For **all things are yours;**²² **Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas...**

Paul is essentially saying to the Corinthians: "We all belong to you. If you only claim one of us, you are claiming too little since all of us are yours." But Paul does not say "all of us" are yours, he says "all things are yours." This does include the apostles which were given by the Spirit to the Corinthians, but it is not limited to them.

1 Corinthians 3:21 Therefore let no man glory 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 ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.**

Paul is saying to them, you don't belong to Paul, you belong to Christ, and Christ is God's.

Aren't Paul, Apollos and Cephas servants of God? But only that! They should recall what Paul wrote back in 1:13.

1 Corinthians 1:13 Is Christ divided? **was Paul crucified for you?** or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

Paul is asking, "Did any of the apostles die for you?" No? So, stop with all the divisions and being satisfied with so little when God has given you so much more. Paul, Apollos and every other minister (and I say "minister" instead of apostle because God gave more than just apostles when He "gave gifts unto men") were given for their benefit.

But there is more to vs. 21 than just those men.

1 Corinthians 3:21 Therefore let no man glory 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 ye are Christ's; and Christ *is* God's.

That's twice Paul has said "all are yours" (vv. 21 and 22).

Notice in vs. 22, Paul expands the list beyond ministers. So what does Paul mean when he includes life, death, etc.? How do these things belong to the Corinthians? In what way do these things belong to any of us?

I want to answer these questions by dipping our theological toe into the massively deep waters of the doctrine of Divine Aseity, which is my way of saying we are not going to go very deeply into this doctrine, but I do want you to know about it.

I do plan to produce a Bare Bones Study on this subject which I find absolutely captivating, and at that time I will do it much more justice than we have time for today.

I bring it up because I think the explanation for what Paul means when he says "all things are yours" lies within the boundaries of this doctrine.

So, let me see if I can keep this brief.

What is Aseity? The word comes from two Latin words, **a** = "of, by or from" + **se** = "self" (think of the "se" as the first two letters of our word, "self") + the suffix, **ity** = a state of being.

(A similar example would be the word "deity" which comes from the Latin word for God, "deus").

Putting it all together, aseity is the property by which a being exists of and from itself.

So, what is the doctrine of the aseity of God, or Divine Aseity?

Aseity is the doctrine that presents God as self-existent. That is to say, God does not depend on any other cause than Himself for His existence. This represents God as absolutely independent and self-existent by nature.

Aseity has two aspects, one positive and one negative: absolute independence and self-existence.

W. N. Clarke writes:

"In its negative meaning...[aseity] affirms that God is uncaused, depending on no other being for the source of His existence. In its positive meaning, it affirms that God is completely self-sufficient, having within Himself the sufficient reason for His own existence."

As a part of aseity, God is said to be incapable of changing (see Hebrews 13:8). Changing implies development. Since God was, and is, and is to be the Absolute Perfection, there is no need to change.

Self-existence sets God apart from every other thing or person in such remarkable ways that, to study it and begin to truly understand and appreciate the aseity of God, causes me (and I hope, you) to stand in awe of God in a way that you may not have done before. This doctrine can be life changing, even for a person who has been saved for years and has studied the Bible extensively.

Most of you listening to this understand that God has always existed; that He is eternal.

Psalm 90:2 Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even **from everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.**

God had no beginning and He will have no end. Deuteronomy 33 says that God is eternal.

Deuteronomy 33:27 **The eternal God is thy** refuge, and underneath *are* the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy *them*.

And those who put their trust in Jesus Christ as their all-sufficient Savior, will be given eternal life.

Romans 6:23 For the wages of sin *is* death; but the gift of God *is* eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

And just so you are thinking about this properly, eternal life and everlasting life are not quite the same thing. Think of the difference like this: everlasting is a one way street; talking about forever only in one direction. Most of the time in the Bible, this is talking about the future.

But eternal has a 2-way street in mind. It is talking about both past and the future being without end.

Everlasting means there will be no end to whatever is being spoken of.

Psalm 145:13 Thy kingdom *is* an **everlasting kingdom**, and thy dominion *endureth* throughout all generations.

Because the kingdom will “endure” this is a reference to the future.

Romans 6:22 But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end **everlasting life.**

So, God's kingdom will be everlasting, it will not end. The life we are given by God is everlasting, it has no end. But it did have a beginning. Just as the kingdom has a beginning. In the sense of Romans 6:22, everlasting is describing how long we will have that life.

The difference between eternal and everlasting is that when a thing is eternal, it does not just mean it lasts forever, but it means that it has always been; it had no beginning either. God is not just everlasting, He is eternal.

You may say, "Hold it a minute, the Bible says we were given eternal life when we trusted Christ, but we didn't always have it, so how can that be without beginning?"

The answer is this: eternal, in the sense of eternal life, is not describing how long we have had it; it is describing the kind of life that is given to you.

So, everlasting life and eternal life are describing two different things: everlasting life is talking about how long it lasts, how long we will have it, while eternal life is describing what kind of life we will have. So when the Bible uses both terms, it is describing the kind of life (eternal) that we have been given, and it is describing how long we have that life (everlasting), forever.

Who is the only one who has life with no beginning and no end? That is God. So, God's life is eternal; He has eternal life within Himself. What He gives to us upon our faith in Christ is His life which is eternal life because His life had no beginning. Do you see?

There is a lot more to say about this, but all I'm trying to do right now is set us up for understanding the 1 Corinthians 3 passage. To do this I have to do two things: 1) explain a little about aseity, and 2) take us to Acts 17.

In Acts 17, Paul has traveled to Athens, Greece. He is waiting for Silas and Timothy to join him there.

Acts 17:15 And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

While Paul is waiting, he cannot help but notice just how much idolatry there is in the city. They are worshipping every god imaginable.

Acts 17:16 Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

So, naturally, Paul makes his case for the true and living God and he does this both in the synagogue with the Jewish religious leaders, and in the city center where all the Greek philosophers would gather to speak and debate. So, Paul is debating with the religious crowd

who do not know about the dispensational change, and the secular crowd who do not know about the only true God.

Acts 17:17 Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.¹⁸ Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods: because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.¹⁹ And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, *is*?

The Areopagus is an assembly of supreme judges of Athens, where they hold forth a sort of tribunal or council or court, depending on what is on the docket before them.

The place of the Areopagus is on a hill in the center of the city; Mars Hill. Historically, this may be the most celebrated tribunal in the world and every Greek had much confidence in this body's decisions as it was widely known for justice and correctness.

Among its duties was to pass judgment on criminals, reward the virtuous and they paid special attention to blasphemies against the gods and to the performance of the sacred mysteries of religion. Paul has been brought there to be questioned by this council for Paul seems to be a "setter forth of strange gods" and he may introduce a new mode of worship.

Verse 19 indicates this is a respectful inquiry; Paul is not in trouble.

Acts 17:19 And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, *is*?²⁰ For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears: we would know therefore what these things mean.²¹ (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

Now let's read what Paul says to them, for it is in this discourse that we find what we are after; an explanation of 1 Corinthians 3. Let's read the whole passage and then we will come back and pull two verses out of it to focus on.

Acts 17:22 Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.²³ For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.²⁴ God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;²⁵ Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;²⁶ And hath made of one

blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; ²⁷ That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us: ²⁸ For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. ²⁹ Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device. ³⁰ And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent: ³¹ Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by *that* man whom he hath ordained; *whereof* he hath given assurance unto all *men*, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

The Book of 1 Corinthians
1 Corinthians 4:1-5
Session 17: What is Yours (cont.)

The first thing to pull out of the passage is vs. 25.

Acts 17:25 Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing,
seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

I am hoping this will ring a bell with you, as Paul said to the Corinthians that “all things are yours” (1 Corinthians 3:21-22).

Here in Acts 17, Paul is saying that the only reason any man has being, the only reason anyone has physical life is because of this “unknown God” which he is declaring to them. And not only that, but God has given to all (that means saved and lost) “all things.” What does that mean? Does that mean that God has given them all livestock, has given them all winning lottery tickets, have given them all wealth, has given them all good health? No. The “all things” are in a context.

It means the reason your lungs keep working and the reason your heart keeps beating, even when you are asleep, is because of this unknown God. The reason you have anything is because of this God. The reason you know how to perform your craft, build a building, plant a crop, make clothes, build a fire, capture fresh water, create new things, have an idea is because this God exists. Everything that exists is able to exist because God has given all things.

That does not mean that God is making those things do what they do. God is not making men murder or steal or lie. Those things are of their own choosing. But the only reason a man can do anything: love his wife, protect his children, contribute to his society, work his job, help those in need, serve the unfortunate, or (if he so chooses) to destroy those around him, to curse God, to promote evil and to be selfish; the only reason a man can do anything at all, think anything at, be anything at all – is because God has given him life, breath and all things.

Look at the second verse we want to pull from this passage, verse 28.

Acts 17:28 For **in him we live, and move, and have our being;** as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

When Paul says “in him” he is not talking about them being “in Christ.” Again, he is setting forth the truth that we live, move and have our very being because of this unknown God.

Now if God has given to every person (lost or saved) life, breath and all things – which He has – then take that understanding back to 1 Corinthians 3:21-23.

1 Corinthians 3:21 Therefore let no man glory 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 ye are Christ's; and Christ *is* God's.

If you are a being, it is because there is God. If you have Paul, it is because there is God. If you have Apollos, it is because God is. If there are ministers, and if there is a message of truth, that is only because of God.

The world exists because there is God. There is life and death because there is God. The things present are because there is God; you are here because you are in the mind of God. The things to come are because there is God; you only have a future because God has determined a future will be.

Don't mistake what is being said here. God is not manipulating the free will of men so that they only do what He wants them to do; that is not what I'm saying. I am saying that when God says of a thing that there is no more future, then no one will have a future of whatever thing that is. For example, we only have a dispensation of Gentile grace (DoGG) because there is a DoGG in the mind of God.

If there is anything you enjoy, a sunset, a rainbow, a rain shower, a mountain, a sandy beach, a blue sky, the Milky Way, a full moon, fresh fallen snow, a cool breeze...you name it, who do you think gave those things? How about gravity, and oxygen and plants to produce oxygen, who did that? It wasn't men, it was God.

And if someone is a minister, even the apostle Paul: who made him possible? Paul didn't do that on his own – it is God.

And if a man invents something you like, such as air conditioning, or a fan, or electric lights, then you know that all the laws that govern those things by which they can be discovered and by which they work – all come from God.

A man may plow a field, plant the seeds, water the plants, but who makes the seed germinate and grow and produce fruit after its kind? That is God. He has given all things.

The point here is this, and it is only a small part of aseity, if there was no God, there would be nothing. If God ever ceased to exist, so would everything and everyone – instantly. If anything ever fell out of the mind of God, it would cease to exist.

And if God gives all things to unsaved men, how much more does Paul mean is ours, when we are in Christ? "And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's."

For the Corinthians, they don't need to bicker over who they will follow, Paul or Apollos, for God has given all of the apostles and teachers to them for their benefit, which means God should get all the glory.

So, while even an unsaved man who is spiritually dead can live and move and have his being because God is, then think about what is available for those who are in Christ, who are spiritually alive!

By saying that God has given them all things, Paul is not saying that everything in life will be pleasant for the Corinthians. Just as every minister is for their benefit, so is everything they encounter: life, death, etc. Reminds you of Romans 8:28, doesn't it? It should. All of the things we go through and experience are meant to conform us to the image of God's Son. Even the sufferings are meant to make us more than conquerors. And this is possible because we belong to Christ!

You may have forgotten about this, but what we have covered is the first of two connected sections. The first section is about how we think about ourselves...

1 Corinthians 3:18 **Let no man deceive himself.** If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

...while the second section is about how we think about others.

The second section is found in 1 Corinthians 4:1-6 and it also begins with a third person singular command.

1 Corinthians 4:1 **Let a man so account of us,** as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

The second section in chapter 4 is about how to regard others, especially God's servants. These verses rehearse the argument of 1 Corinthians 2:6-3:17 and reinforces the conclusion that human evaluation is inherently faulty (1 Corinthians 2:6-16). Why is that? Because men do not know everything a man does and they do not know his heart; only God knows those things in their entirety.

The "us" in 1 Corinthians vs. 1 refers to Paul and the other apostles of the DoGG.

Here in 4:1-6, Paul applies this specifically to the evaluation of God's servants (ministers or apostles) (1 Corinthians 3:5-17).

1 Corinthians 4:3 But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. ⁴ For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

Paul is saying that because he is God's servant, only God can truly evaluate him. Servants don't judge each other, for that belongs to the master alone.

For the members of the body of Christ, all will be evaluated and judged righteously at the judgment seat of Christ (JSOC).

Looking at vs. 4, Paul is saying that even his own assessment of his ministry is not decisive. Why? Because it is the Lord who gives the final word on how faithful Paul has been.

1 Corinthians 4:5 Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

Paul is saying that some of the Corinthians, who think they have assessed Paul's ministry, should wait until "the time," which refers to the JSOC.

The Corinthians were engaging in the assessment of ministers. Because their knowledge was limited and partial, that was an unfruitful exercise. What is hidden in the lives of others will be exposed at the JSOC. God knows everything and will judge accordingly and He is the only One who can do that. God will bring to light the hidden things of darkness and make manifest the counsels of the heart.

Romans 14:4 Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth...

Now back to the text.

1 Corinthians 4:6 And these things, brethren, **I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos** for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of *men above that which is written*, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

Paul is saying that he is illustrating this truth (not thinking of men above that which is written) by making an application to himself and Apollos.

What does Paul mean when he says that they might learn not to think of men above that which is written? He is talking about what is written in the Scriptures concerning men, their actions and their hearts. You see, Paul is trying to get them to focus on the message, not the messenger. So, if there is any glory in this situation, it goes to God. God is the one who gave the message and made it true, not the messenger.

While Paul and the other ministers are worthy of honor because they labor in the word, the Corinthians had begun to focus on the men as opposed to the message.

Look, if I ever show you something or teach you something or present some truth that benefits you in some way spiritually, thank God for that. I'm not being humble, I am being biblical.

I did not invent that truth; it was in the mind of God eternally. I do not make that truth work like it does, God does that. I didn't come up with it, God did. It is my privilege to learn it and it is my responsibility to teach it to you so that you also might learn it. You can be grateful for that, but don't get things twisted, none of this is about me; it is about the message. And the glory for any good that comes from the message belongs to God and Him alone.

This gives me an opportunity to talk to you about God's glory and I would like to do this within the framework of the attributes of God.

If you recall what we said earlier about Divine Aseity, that God exists in and of Himself. He is complete and perfectly whole without anything outside of himself. He is sufficient in and of Himself. He is unique. And He is separate from His creation in the sense that no part of creation is a subset of God (Pantheism) or contains deity.

God is eternal. That is to say that He had no beginning and He will have no end. There was no one before Him and there will be no one after Him.

He is immutable. What does that mean? It means that God is a spirit, whose being, wisdom, power; holiness, justice, goodness, and truth are infinite, eternal, and unchangeable. Immutability means that God's nature is the same yesterday, today and forever.

God is independent of everything in that He has no need of anything outside of Himself. God is sufficient within Himself. As the Creator, God is not only the source of all that was created, but He is also the sustainer of all that exists. If anything were to ever leave the mind of God, it would cease to be.

God is the source of all true wisdom, power, holiness, justice, love, goodness and truth. He does not just possess these things; He is all of these things. They are part of His being, not just things that He does.

Thinking about just these few divine attributes begins to provide a background for what Paul is getting at; that God alone is worthy. Look at Revelation 4.

Revelation 4:11 Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Glory belongs to God alone, which is why God can be "jealous" and not share His glory with another and it is not a sin. How can that be? Because it is not a sin for God to be jealous of the glory that rightfully belongs to Him and only Him. This word "jealous" is used this way in connection with the worship of false gods.

Exodus 20:5 Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the **LORD** **thy God am a jealous God**, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth *generation* of them that hate me;

Exodus 34:14 For thou shalt worship no other god: for the **LORD**, **whose name is Jealous**, *is a jealous God*:

This is the verse which Oprah Winfrey says caused her to abandon traditional Christianity, as she could not fathom God being jealous. But I think what she may have missed is two things: 1) the word jealous has 15 definitions and I think she may have only been thinking of the usual way we think of the word which has to do with ill-will toward another because of their superiority, envy or holding a grudge (Oxford English Dictionary: jealousy 4b)

God reserves to Himself the right to exclusive worship. Some reject God on this basis. How can a holy and perfect God be jealous? Is God insecure?

Isaiah 42:8 I *am* the **LORD**: that *is* my name: and my glory will I not give to another, neither my praise to graven images.

Paul says that he is jealous with godly jealousy.

2 Corinthians 11:2 For **I am jealous over you with godly jealousy**: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present *you as* a chaste virgin to Christ.

In what way is Paul jealous and how can jealousy be godly? In the way of the following definition:

OED: jealousy, n. (1526) **Solicitude** or anxiety for the preservation or well-being of something; vigilance in guarding a possession from loss or damage.

Paul now tells the Corinthians why he has given this extended reflection in his ministry and that of Apollos. It is for their benefit; “for your sakes.” And how are they meant to benefit?

The problem is that the Corinthians had a pride issue and were “puffed up” against one another in their assessing the qualities of the various ministers and ministries. Paul is writing to correct their ungodly thinking which has the effect of them being puffed up (prideful) for one minister against another.

We are really quick to look at certain behaviors and call them sins, while overlooking the less conspicuous things like pride. But God hates pride so much more than you might realize. Why? Because pride swings a door in your soul wide open to the adversary and allows him to establish a stronghold in your life and provides a foundation for rebellion against God. So, Paul is countering that.