

Text: 1 Cor. 2:6-9

Title: "Spiritual adults"

Time: 7/21/2013 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: One of my favorite poems is Rudyard Kipling's poem called "If":

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;

If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream — and not make dreams your master;
If you can think — and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;

If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build them up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings
And never breathe a word about your loss;

If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,

And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: 'Hold on!'

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings – nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,
If all men count with you, but none too much;

If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,
And – which is more – you'll be a Man, my son!

That is a poem written by a father to a son about how to be a man. Fathers are necessary for sons, in part, because sons need to hear from their fathers how to be a man, and whether or not they have become men yet.

The Apostle Paul uses a word in our text this morning that means *adult*. It is the word translated *perfect* in v. 6. We think of the opposite of perfect as being imperfect. Paul speaks of the opposite of being perfect as being immature or childlike (1 Cor. 3:1, 14:20; Heb. 5:13-14).

Like Rudyard Kipling and all good fathers like him, our God is our Father. And just like a good dad wants his son to grow from childhood to manhood and his daughter to grow from childhood to womanhood, so also God the Father wants us to grow to become spiritual adults.

It is as though we have some instruction in these four verses that tell us, "If you do this, you will be a man, My son." The title of the message this morning is "Spiritual adulthood," and I want us to think about two simple characteristics of spiritual adults from our passage this morning.

I. Spiritual adults recognize what is wrong with the wisdom of this world (v. 6).

Illustration: As I look at the pictures we have of my kids when they were little, I have many fond memories. There is something very special about the joys of having children in the home and the cuteness of their young childhood.

But we all recognize that God's design for every child is to grow into an adult, and in spite of the joy that our own children bring us when they are young, none of us would want one of our children to stay that way forever. God intends for them to be adults; it is the purpose of their lives that they become adults; and it is tragic if they do not become that.

Application: This same idea of God's purpose and design for the life of a maturing believer is behind this word *perfect*. Something is perfect in this sense when it becomes what it was designed to be, when it reaches the goal that God has set for it.

A child is not perfect yet, because God intends people to be and do what adults are and can do. This intention is an important goal of apostolic preaching (Col. 1:28, "Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus").

God has an idea in mind regarding the purpose of the life of a believer, and the wisdom of the world has a very different idea when it comes to the purpose of life. We find the content of the world's wisdom in 1 John 2:15-17—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life. The world teaches us that the chief end of man is to get

what he wants and to be noticed. He wants to experience certain things, and he should get to do that – the lust of the flesh; he wants to possess certain things, and he should be able to have them – the lust of the eyes; and he wants the approval and praise of others for his efforts in these pursuits – and this is his boastful pride of life.

What is wrong with those life goals? (1) They are not from the Father, they are from the world, and (2) the world is passing away. Paul makes the same point about the rulers of this world in our passage (v. 6). It turns out that the world in question has not only a wisdom, but also rulers or leaders who promote that wisdom.

In politics, we have godless politicians who promote abortion and gay marriage. In entertainment, we have godless movie stars and rock stars and other famous people of pop culture who promote lust and pride. In religion, we have teachers who are willing to tell people what they want to hear when they want to hear it so that they can feel good about themselves.

Spiritual adults can recognize this danger. And they see that this wisdom of the world and the rulers of this world who promote this wisdom are passing away or being brought to naught (v. 6, see 1:28, same word – “come to nought/ nothing”).

Do not live for what comes to nothing. Do not follow the leaders of a culture that tells you to live for what comes to nothing. Be a spiritual adult, and recognize what is wrong with the wisdom of this world.

II. Spiritual adults recognize what is right with the wisdom of God (vv. 7-9).

Illustration: John Quincy Adams wrote an epitaph for his parents' graves, John and Abigail Adams, which can be seen at a church he attended in Quincy, MA.

About his father his words said, "On the fourth of July, 1776, he pledged his life, fortune, and sacred honor to the independence of his country. On the third of September, 1783, he affixed his seal to the definitive treaty with Great Britain, which acknowledged that independence, and consummated the redemption of his pledge.

"On the fourth of July, 1826, he was summoned to the independence of immortality, and to the judgment of his God. This house will bear witness to his piety; this town, his birthplace, to his munificence; history to his patriotism; posterity to the depth and compass of his mind."

Then of his mother he wrote, "At his side sleeps, till the trump shall sound, Abigail, his beloved and only wife, daughter of William and Elizabeth (Quincy) Smith; in every relation of life a pattern of filial, conjugal, maternal, and social virtue."

Application: We would say that the person who wrote that about his parents had to be an adult. One of the marks of adulthood is the appreciation that comes to us for the accomplishments, sacrifices, and love of good parents, if we were blessed to have some. A child cannot express that appreciation in the same way.

This axiom is true in the spiritual realm. Spiritual adults recognize what is right with the wisdom of God; those who are immature in the faith often wrestle with the rightness of that wisdom. Notice with me three things that are right about the wisdom of God, which we need to recognize in a mature way this morning.

1. God is wise in His unchangeable plan for our glory (v. 7).

Illustration: Sometimes adults keep hidden what it is that they are trying to do for the children in their care, and those children have trouble understanding what is going on until they grow up and become adults themselves.

I had a fourth grade teacher who would keep her intentions hidden from time to time. I had the hiccups in class one day, and I was raising my hand to ask if I could be dismissed to get a drink, but Mrs. Spurrier would not call on me and just kept right on teaching. My fellow classmates were beginning to giggle as I kept my hand raised and kept right on hiccupping.

Then suddenly without warning, Mrs. Spurrier whirled around and shouted at me to keep my hand down while she was trying to teach. I know now that she was trying to cure me of my hiccups without having to miss any class time by scaring me, but I did not know it then.

Application: We are told that one of the wonderful things about the wisdom of God is that it involves an unchangeable plan for our glory. This plan was predestined before the world, and so it cannot be stopped by the power of the world. It is for our glory, which meets our greatest need as sinners who have fallen short of the glory of God.

We are also told that this predestined unchangeable plan for our glory involves a newly revealed mystery that had been hidden. The word translated *hidden* is used in two other contexts in Paul's writings, where he goes into more detail about the nature of this hidden plan (Eph. 3:1-13, v. 9, "the mystery which for ages has been hidden in God who created all things," i.e. the salvation of the Gentiles (vv. 5-6)

in God's new program called *the church* (vv. 20-21); Col. 1:24-29, v. 26, "the mystery which has been hidden in past ages," i.e. the church in v. 24).

So spiritual adults appreciate what the plan of their heavenly Father is, though it was a mystery kept secret or hidden for ages, namely that Gentiles would be saved through the ministry of the church. Spiritual adults understand that the wisdom of God involves His glorious plan for the church. The church is not viewed as a threat or an inconvenience by spiritual adults. Rather, it is seen as that part of God's wisdom that constitutes his unchangeable plan for our glory, that we should be saved and sanctified and ultimately glorified in Christ, even though we are Gentiles.

2. God's wisdom is Jesus, the Lord of glory (v. 8).

Application: The rulers of this world certainly missed the sovereignty of Christ—His royal right to be the king of our lives and our need to be obedient to Him. Spiritual adults do not miss this. The King of Glory is not easily missed (Psalm 24). Is Jesus Christ the Lord of glory of your life? Are you humbly following and obeying Him, seeking to do His will? If not, chances are you would have crucified Him too, just like the rulers of this world did.

3. God's wisdom is love that brings with Him (v. 9).

Illustration: Sometimes children have to believe that their parents have their best interest at heart when it is difficult to believe that. I had the wonderful opportunity to be a part of the ordination council serving First Baptist Church of North Conway's ordination of Sean Cowland. That was on Tuesday, and on Monday I told my son, Kent, that he would be coming with me.

Kent was not sure that was the best way for a boy his age to spend his day. To be honest, my wife was not sure about that either. But I think some day when Kent becomes a man, he may thank me for the time we went to North Conway together. We had a good time.

Application: As we grow in the Lord, it can be difficult to respond to some of the Lord's dealings in a loving way. But we must, remembering the promise of this verse.

Conclusion: How close are we this morning to spiritual adulthood? Have we been acting spiritually immature for tragically too long, enamored by the wisdom of the world and undervaluing the wisdom of our God? Our Father is a better parent than to allow our immaturity to persist. May He continue His work in us so that someday we can hear Him say, "You are now a man, my son."

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching