



"Everything we take into our minds is trying to teach us something about how we should think the world is."

—Jon Morrison

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The Fifth Teacher (Part Two)

Part One showed that Jesus Christ's iron-clad rule for recognizing false prophets and teachers was to evaluate their fruit ([Matthew 7:15-20](#))—what is produced not only in their lives but especially by their messages. Where the message fails to align with Scripture, bad fruit will be produced. The inverse is also true: Where an abundance of ungodly fruit exists, like the [works of the flesh](#), its source is an incorrect belief system taught by a false teacher.

Corinth was one such hotbed of carnality, yet the four identified teachers—Paul, Apollos, Peter, and Christ ([I Corinthians 1:12](#))—were above reproach, definitely not the source of the division and other fleshly works among the Corinthians. Instead, a fifth, unnamed teacher was influencing them. Who was this fifth teacher?

It is vital to identify him, for he is still around today. The fifth teacher is not a person, though. It is the [wisdom](#) of the age—the voice of [the world](#), the ideas and attitudes originating with the prince of the power of the air ([Ephesians 2:2](#)), which are re-broadcast by every unconverted person and

even converted persons who allow it. This worldly wisdom, speaking with countless voices, was influencing the Corinthians more than the outstanding teachers [God](#) had provided.

In the first four chapters of I Corinthians, Paul mentions wisdom or wise people 29 times, two-thirds of which are negative. The apostle addresses this worldly wisdom first then dives into the specifics of the congregation's carnality. Notice how he identifies this fifth teacher: "For Christ did not send me to baptize, but to preach [the gospel](#), *not with wisdom of words*, lest the cross of Christ should be made of no effect" ([I Corinthians 1:17](#); emphasis ours throughout).

He contrasts the gospel message he brought to what he terms the "wisdom of words." The Greek culture highly valued eloquent arguments, and this cultural preference—this wisdom of the age—was causing the Corinthians to cast aside the teaching of an apostle! He continues:

For it is written: "I will destroy the *wisdom of the wise*, and bring to nothing the *understanding of the prudent*." Where is *the wise*? Where is the scribe? Where is the *disputer of this age*? Has not God made foolish the *wisdom of this world*? For since, in the wisdom of God, the world through wisdom did not know God, it pleased God through the foolishness of the message preached to save those who believe. For Jews request a sign, and Greeks *seek after wisdom*; but we preach Christ crucified, to the Jews a stumbling block and to the Greeks foolishness, but to those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men, and the weakness of God is stronger than men. ([I Corinthians 1:19-25](#))

Paul juxtaposes the wisdom of Christ's message with the wisdom espoused by Greeks and Jews, the prevailing ideas that severely damaged the [faith](#) of the [first-century church](#). When people came in contact with the truth, they evaluated it through the lens of cultural views of the day rather than using the truth as the plumb-line for the wisdom of men.

In this vein, the Gnostics looked at the message of Christ through the lens of [Gnosticism](#) and ended up with a belief system that mixed truth and error. Others took the gospel message and studied it through the lens of Judaism, creating an unholy hybrid. Today, people evaluate the Word of God through the lens of sociologists, scientists, and the new releases on the bestseller lists. The wisdom of the age changes over time and between cultures, but it is always against the truth spoken by godly servants whom the Head of the church has gifted.

However, we speak wisdom among those who are mature, yet *not the wisdom of this age*, nor of the rulers of this age, who are coming to nothing. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God ordained before the ages for our glory. . . . Now we have received, *not the spirit of the world*, but the Spirit who is from God, that we might know the things that have been freely given to us by God. ([I Corinthians 2:6-7](#), 12)

Here, Paul again identifies the wisdom of the age as being opposed to divine wisdom. He also stresses that the new Spirit they had received was unlike the spirit of the world. The fifth teacher had inundated them so much that it was difficult for them to discern the spirits.

Do you not know that you are the temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you? If anyone defiles the temple of God, God will destroy him. For the temple of God is holy, which temple you are. ([I Corinthians 3:16-17](#))

He brings up defiling the temple of God's Spirit. We often understand this as an admonition to take care of our physical bodies, a reasonable application (see [I Corinthians 6:20](#)). If we keep reading, though, the context remains the wisdom of the age, so we can conclude that defiling the temple deals more with what goes into our minds than into our mouths. Paul imparts a similar admonition in [I Corinthians 10:21](#), where he warns about trying to drink the Lord's cup as well as the cup of demons or partaking of the Lord's table and the table of demons.

His concern is their spiritual food, the source of their worldliness. However, their instruction was not coming from what we normally think of as a false minister. What was leading them astray was not a message coming from the pulpit one day a week; it was issuing from a multitude of other sources every day of the week. The fifth teacher's contrary messages were drowning out the true teachers' biblical instruction, and the Corinthians' shameful conduct was the evidence.

In Part Three, we will consider some ways this fifth teacher may be speaking to us today.

- David C. Grabbe

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by John W. Ritenbaugh (1932-2023)

An individual's worldview is shaped by his past experiences, family values, and the culture into which he was born. A person's worldview influences every decision he makes. If we do not give God the prominent position in our worldview, we will make self-destructive choices, as did our original parents, Adam and Eve. Our worldview is volatile, subject to change as we are drawn away by the enticements of Satan, the world, and our powerful carnal nature. If God's people do not nourish God's gift of His Holy Spirit by meditating on His Word and responding to its prompts to morality and character, Satan will come to control our worldview through his tools of mainstream media, pop culture, and humanistic education—all of which are now the basic determinants of the worldview of the godless. God admonishes His called-out ones to nourish and augment the "God factor" in our worldview, lest we be drawn away to spiritual death.

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