

November 8, 2020

The Religion of Selfism

1 Corinthians 4:6-13

The autism of the Church

Remember Paul wrote this letter to the Corinthian Church because they had several issues that were threatening the very existence of the Church. Paul has been consumed with only one problem so far: the factions that had formed around their teachers, for some said “I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos” (1:12) Paul is finally reaching the climax of his first argument here halfway into chapter four. And his tone is fever pitch. The root problem with the Corinthians was they were self-absorbed. We have several children in this body who have been diagnosed with autism. It’s very interesting disorder, because these precious children are—to a lesser or greater degree—lost within themselves. The etymology of autism comes from two words: the prefix *autos* meaning self; and the suffix *ismos* meaning the state of something.¹ Autism is self-ism. Paul’s essential claim is that the Corinthians were spiritually autistic. They had a morbid absorption in themselves. And this is the universal disorder of every human being. Dear loved ones, you’re most fundamental problem is that you are morbidly self-absorbed. You are spiritually autistic.

“Mirror, mirror, on the wall...”

Children, boys and girls, do you remember the what the wicked queen in Snow White asked the magic mirror? “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” What was the mirror’s normal response? “Thou, O Queen, art the fairest in the land,” But then one day the mirror gave a different answer: “Mirror, mirror on the wall, who’s the fairest of them all?” It answered: “Snow White, O Queen, is the fairest of them all.” And that is when all the poison and wickedness of the queen came out against Snow White. She couldn’t bear the

¹ Source: https://www.etymonline.com/word/autism#etymonline_v_18967 Accessed November 7, 2020

thought that someone was fairer than her. Children you have the same problem as the wicked witch. You don't like it when you think others are better than you. You want to be the best, you want everyone else to think you're the best.

A theater for Christ

Dear congregation, the reason why Paul has painstakingly taken four chapters to address this problem is because this is the most foundational problem you face. If this problem doesn't get corrected first, then no other problem can get corrected.² You were born into the religion of selfism. You naturally worship yourself. And until you see that you don't exist *for yourself*, but that God made to be a spectacle for Christ, a theater in which the world can see Christ, hear Christ, feel Christ, then you will remain, as Paul put it, people of the flesh, mere infants in Christ (1 Corinthians 3:1). Please ask the Lord this morning as you are hearing these words: "Father, how do I worship myself? How have I lived for myself and not for the sake of the LORD Jesus Christ? How have I puffed myself up over others?" Mature Christians will ask those questions. Christians who absorbed in selfism will not.

The Big Idea...

The fundamental problem of humanity is that we worship ourselves

- ☆ The Conceit of Selfism
- ☆ The Cause of Selfism
- ☆ The Contempt of Selfism

² This was Paul's logic in chapter 1. When they said "I follow Paul," or "I follow Apollos," he responded: "Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul?" (1:13). You see, they had to functionally adopt another Savior in order to divide into factions.

I. The Conceit of Selfism

'Look how low we are!'

Please look with me at v.6 "I have applied *all these things* to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers..." Let's stop there. What *things* has Paul applied to himself and Apollos? Everything that he has already said about ministers of the gospel. We are...

3:5 We are *servants*, table waiters or busboys, that God assigned for your sake

3:6 We are *farmers*, "I planted, Apollos watered," manual laborers for your sake

3:10-15 We are *builders*, sent to build you up on the foundation of Jesus Christ

4:1-5 We are *third tier galley slaves* and stewards of the mysteries of God

Don't go beyond what is written

Notice that Paul has progressively described himself as worse and worse. Imagine taking huge stone and casting it into the sea, and it sinks down lower and lower, not resting until it reaches the bottom.³ Paul is saying 'that is who we are: we are in the lowest position possible.' Then he says I have applied these things to us, v.6 "*for your benefit.*" Now why would it benefit the Church to know their leaders are these lowly things? He tells us halfway through v.6 "...that you may learn *by us* not to go beyond *what is written...*" Now whenever Paul appeals to *what is written*, he is always speaking about *what is written* in OT. So then what OT Scriptures is he talking about? The most natural answer is that Paul is referring to OT Scriptures that he already quoted in the first three chapters.⁴ Paul quoted the OT six times in the first three chapters.⁵ But all of them can be summed up in just one quote. Look at 1:31 "So that, as it is written, 'Let the one

³ Wilhelmus A Brakel, *The Christian's Reasonable Service, Vol. 4: Ethics and Eschatology*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Reformed Heritage Books, 1995), pg. 68

⁴ Roy E. Ciampa & Brian S. Rosner, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, (Grand Rapids, MI.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2010), pg. 176

⁵ 1:19, 31; 2:9, 16; 3:19, 20

who boasts, boast in the Lord.” That is the fundamental thing. In fact this is the essence of everything written in the OT—the one thing that v.6 claims that we must never go beyond: we must never boast in anything but the LORD himself. Putting Paul’s argument together *then* would sound like this: ‘We confess that we apostles—and by extension every pastor—are the lowest of the low, SO THAT you may learn from our example not to boast in anything—not in this teacher or that teacher—but only the LORD.’⁶

The real problem in Corinth

You see the problem in Corinth was *not* that they were boasting. Everyone boasts. God designed us to boast. The problem was they were boasting in the wrong thing, namely, themselves. That’s what was behind their dividing up into factions. I think many evangelicals read the first few chapters in Corinthians and dismiss it because they reason like this: “Well I don’t don’t have a party spirit, I don’t pit one teacher against another, therefore this text doesn’t apply to me.” Is that how you read 1 Corinthians? “I can’t wait till Pastor gets past these first few chapters because I don’t struggle with this at all.” Maybe so, maybe you don’t struggle with party spirit. But you need to understand that there is a difference between *the essence* of a thing and *the expression* of a thing. Party spirit is only the *expression* of the real problem, it is not the problem itself. Just like when someone catches a cold, their sneezing is only an *expression* of the problem, it is not the problem itself. The real problem is the virus. Party spirit in Corinth was only the expression of the virus, not the virus itself. The virus in Corinth, the disease that they suffered from was *selfism*. Please look at the last part of v.6. Everything that Paul has said so far, he has said *so that*—end of v.6 “...none of you may be *puffed up* in favor of one against another.” To be puffed up simply means to be inflated, or to be swollen. It is to be bigger than you actually are. Our little chihuahua Krypto puffs himself up whenever a stranger comes to our home. He makes his hair on his back stands straight up and he starts to strut

⁶ Just consider the disasters that followed those who went beyond what was written: Adam and Eve (Genesis 3); Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 10); King Saul (1 Samuel 13, 15); Uzzah (2 Samuel 6); the Corinthians themselves (1 Cor. 11:30).

like a big dog although he's only a little bigger than a football. He tries to make himself bigger than he is. That's what was *ultimately* happening in Corinth. The Corinthians were making themselves bigger or more important or more esteemed than they actually were. It was all about recognition for themselves. They were using their leaders as their own personal status symbols. In essence, the Corinthians were worshipping themselves.

Self-worship: the cause of all our troubles

And that is the cause of all of the problems in the world today: self worship. If you were to ask an unbeliever what is the biggest problem we face in the world today, how do you think they would respond? The biggest problem in the world today is (fill in the blank). What would they say? The wrong politicians are in office? The wrong economic policies are being practiced? Racism? Intolerance? Climate change? Don't you see? 1 Corinthians 1-4 is a microcosm—a miniature picture of all the world's woes. The end of v.6 tells us that the Corinthians were 'against one another.' They were hostile and contentious with one another. Why? Precisely because they were puffed up—they were swollen with conceit. They didn't see themselves as a stone at the bottom of the sea, they saw themselves as eagles soaring over mountains. And that is the reason why the world is the way it is today: everybody worships at the alter of self.⁷

Experimental selfism

Dear congregation, this is our problem. Now perhaps some of you are thinking, "but I'm a Christian, I don't worship myself, I worship Jesus. Yes of

⁷ *The problem* of the human race is disordered worship. That's Paul's theology in Romans 1. He says in v.21 "For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him..." Though all humans know God is glorious and eternal and powerful, they did not worship Him. But they didn't stop worshipping. v.23 says "...exchanged the glory of the immortal God *for images*" to worship. And a result God gave humanity up to the lusts of their hearts (v.24), to their dishonorable passions (v.26) and to their debased mind (v.28). And every imaginable sin follows: homosexuality, covetousness, malice, envy, murder, strife, deceit, gossip, slander, hatred of God, insolence, arrogance, boastfulness, foolishness, faithlessness, heartlessness, and ruthlessness. Every sin comes from self-worship, from putting self at the center.

course I sin, but I don't worship myself." Beloved what is sin, but self-worship? Listen to how Dr. Ed Welch shows that alcohol addiction is not ultimately a problem with alcohol but a problem with selfism.

"When we examine our hearts, we find that the greatest danger is that we are hooked on ourselves. If I am an alcoholic, my ultimate idol is not the bottle. It is *I*. I idolize *myself*. *My* desires are of first importance. *My* cravings rule... Addiction is self-worship. That means that even if I give up alcohol, unless I deal head on with my biggest problem, I will never truly find freedom."⁸

Do you see? Our ultimate problem is not alcohol or sex or any number of other things. The problem is you and me. We are addicted to ourselves. And the way that this played out in Corinth and the way that it plays out in our Church life is very ugly. When everyone is fighting for their own status, their own rights, their own honor, what does that do to a Church? It destroys it. And I hear this all the time. Christians come to Church expecting to get all *their* needs met, all *their* desires fulfilled, all *their* relationships just the way they want them. It seems to me that the American Christian's basic impulse is "how can *my* Church serve *me*?" Instead of "how can I serve others in my Church?" Paul said in **Romans 12:10** "Love one another with brotherly affection. *Outdo one another* in showing honor." That's what the true competition in the Church should be: instead of seeking our own honor, we compete for who can show the most honor to others. Oh what a fearsome sight that would be! A Church whose members love and serve each other without expecting anything in return. A Church that emulates its Master: "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (**Romans 5:8**). That's our **first point**: The conceit of selfism is that we have an inflated view of ourselves, and this always leads to divisions, and factions.

⁸ Edward T. Welch, *Blame It on the Brain?*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing 1998), pg. 197

II. The Cause of Selfism

Examine yourselves!

Paul now exposes the Corinthians functional belief system by asking them three questions. Please look at v.7 “For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” Paul’s questions are aimed at getting them to examine themselves. Why have they become puffed up against one another? Why have they become conceited? So let’s take those questions one at a time?

1. For who sees anything different in you?

Paul’s first question is “For who sees anything different *in you*?” I think the NASB puts it better. It says “For who regards you as superior?” In other words, “The difference between you [and others] is only imaginary.”⁹ Chrysostom paraphrases by saying “Who made you what you are?”¹⁰ Any difference that exists between you and others doesn’t come from you. This is made clear by the second question.

2. What do you have that you did not receive?

“What do you have that you did not receive?” It’s a rhetoric question. There is not one thing that you possess that you did not receive from God Himself. Now this is true of both the Christian and the non-Christian. Listen to how Francis Turretin puts it: “The cause of the difference between good and bad men, better and worse, is not to be sought [in themselves]...For we are all born equally prone to evil, nor is anyone found better or worse than another.”¹¹ The difference is found in God.

⁹ Charles Hodge, *A Commentary on 1 & 2 Corinthians*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2018), pg. 71

¹⁰ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 177

¹¹ Francis Turretin, *Institutes of Elenctic Theology Vol. 1*, (Phillipsburg, NJ.: P & R Publishing, 1992), pg. 681

2.1 Regarding the non-Christian

In regard to the non-Christian, the reason why some are more good relatively speaking than others is because God restrains wickedness in some more and others less. In Genesis 20, when Abraham told the inhabitants of the land that Sarah was his sister so they wouldn't kill him, Abimelech the king took Sarah for his own. God visited him in a dream and told him he was a dead man because he took another man's wife. Abimelech argued his case with the Lord. Picking up in **Genesis 20:5-6** we read "Did he not himself say to me, 'She is my sister'? And she herself said, 'He is my brother.' In the integrity of my heart and the innocence of my hands I have done this." Then God said to him in the dream, "Yes, I know that you have done this in the integrity of your heart, *and it was I who kept you from sinning against me. Therefore I did not let you touch her.*" God directly prevented this unbeliever from being more wicked than he could be. The reason why some unbelievers are 'better' than other unbelievers is only because they received the retraining grace of God. Now God doesn't always act this directly. Sometimes God restrains men from greater evil by giving them a dislike of it or He gives them a milder temperament. Sometimes God gives them better education in morals or puts them under the influence of moral people. Sometimes God gives them a fear of punishment, or a fear of shame for doing wrong. But the point is this: the difference between one unbeliever and another, the reason why one is 'better' than the other is not found in them. **John 3:27** "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven." Or as Paul asked: "What do you have that you did not receive?"

2.1 Regarding the Christian

But Paul's main point here is not for unbelievers. Christian, what do you have that you did not receive? First is there anything that makes you superior to the unbeliever?

Your election came from God not yourself. **Ephesians 1:5** "...he chose us in him before the foundation of the world."

The new birth came from God, not yourself. **John 6:63** “It is the Spirit who gives life; the flesh is no help at all.”

God drew you to Himself, you didn’t draw yourself. **John 6:44** “No one can come to me unless the Father who sent me draws him.”

Your faith comes from God, not from yourself. **Ephesians 2:8-9** “For by grace you have been saved through faith. And this [your faith] is not your own doing; it is the gift of God.”

Paul’s theology here in **v.7** is really the chief difference that Reformed theology has with Pelagianism, Arminianism, and Roman Catholicism. Paul is saying that there is not one thing that we have not received from God including *the very will to believe the gospel*. I was talking with my barber a couple weeks ago, he is an LDS man. Very kind man. God gave me the opportunity to share the gospel with him afterward, and I was stressing this point to him that God’s grace is the deciding factor in our salvation. And he kept on inserting an objection. He said “But you have to give yourself some credit, because *you chose* to believe, *you chose* to say yes, *you chose* to obey.”¹² Dear congregation, if he is right then Paul’s argument falls to the ground. “What do you have that you have not received?” ‘Well Paul, I have my own will, and that is the thing that I exercised to make me better than the next guy.’ But the Scripture doesn’t allow this response. **Philippians 2:13** “...it is God who works in you, *both to will* and to work for his good pleasure.” In other words, when I chose to believe in Jesus Christ, it is because God worked that very will in me to choose Him. It wasn’t the offer of the gospel merely that he presented to me. It wasn’t merely the opportunity to

¹² Mark 4:10-12 And when he was alone, those around him with the twelve asked him about the parables. And he said to them, “To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables, so that “they may indeed see but not perceive, and may indeed hear but not understand, lest they should turn and be forgiven.”

be saved that I had to actuate. No God worked in me the very will to believe.¹³ Dear believer the difference between you and the unbeliever has nothing to do with you. “What do you have that you did not receive?”

But aren't some Christians better than others?

Well then, let's ask our second question: what makes you superior to other Christians? Let's be clear on this point. Christians do have many differences between them. Some Christians are really compassionate, others lack empathy. Some are generous, others stingy. Some are really intelligent, others simple-minded. Some have great gifts of leadership, others are mere followers. Some are really hospitable, others are more closed off. It would be easy to look at all the differences and start dividing up the body into superior and inferior classes. The truth is, you and I are already doing this, at least in the secret places in our minds. That's why this Scripture is so relevant. And Paul's question to us is simply “What do you have that you did not receive?” ‘Wait a minute Paul, are you telling me that the reason why I'm more compassionate than that schlub over there is not because of my efforts? Are you telling me the reason I'm more generous than Mr. and Mrs. Stingy is not because I'm more disciplined than they are? Are you just throwing out all effort and discipline and work in the Christian life?’ How would Paul answer? No. Paul always stressed how vital it is to labor and toil in the work of the Lord. Yet at the same time he was able to say “By the grace of God I am what I am.” Paul could say “I worked harder than any of them, though it was not I, but the grace of God that is with me” (**1 Corinthians 15:10**). Jonathan Edwards explains: “God does not do some of the work and we do the rest. Rather God does all, and we do all. God produces all, and we act all. For that is what He produces, [namely] our own acts.”¹⁴

¹³ **Proverbs 21:1** “The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” Jonathan Edwards says here: “Here [we see that] the will of God determines the wills of men, and that when God pleases to [intervene], he...directs them according to his pleasure, without failure in any instance. This shows that God has not left men's hearts so in their own hands, as to be determined by themselves alone.” Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards Vol. 2*, (Carlisle, PA.: The Banner of Truth Trust, Reprint 2009), pg. 554

¹⁴ Edwards, pg. 557

Why is Fred more compassionate than Sally? Because God produced Fred's acts of compassion in him. Why is Harriet more intelligent than George. Because God produced Harriet's intelligence in her. **Romans 12:6** says that we each have "...gifts that differ according to the grace given us..."¹⁵

3. Why then do you boast?

That brings us to our last question in **v.7**. "If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?" Why do you glory in yourselves, why do you ascribe worth to yourselves, if you received it from God? Do you see how indefensible boasting is? Dear congregation, this one verse should eliminate all arrogance, and infighting and complaining and jealousy and every other vice that we face as a corporate body. God is the author of every good gift that exists in this assembly. **James 1:17** "Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights." How dare any one of us look down our noses at each other.¹⁶ We have no good *in ourselves* that we can take credit for. God alone can take credit for the good we have because all good has been received from Him.

We have received the ability to love each other from God. **1 Thessalonians 4:9** "Now concerning brotherly love you have no need for anyone to write to you, *for you yourselves have been taught by God* to love one another."

We have received a faith that grows and a love that increases from God **2 Thessalonians 1:3-4** "We ought always *to give thanks to God for you*, brothers... because your faith is growing abundantly, *and* the love of every one of you for one another is increasing."

¹⁵ See §60 in Edwards for a whole list of Scripture showing God to be the effectual author of all the good in our lives. Edwards, pg. 556

¹⁶ "A beggar would invite scorn if he were to boast of an expensive garment which someone had loaned him for one day." Brakel, pg. 71

We have received all power, love and self-control from God. **2 Timothy 1:7** "... for God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control."

Hebrews 13:21 says that God has given us "...everything good that [we] may do his will, working in us that which is pleasing in his sight."

There is no good in us that we can take credit for. We can only take credit for the bad. All good has been received by Him alone. Loved ones, do you see how boasting in our own perceived goodness not only divides each other, but it is an offense against God? "God the reason why I am the way I am, is because of my own effort, my own inherent goodness."¹⁷ The person who thinks they are who they are by their own effort robs God of His glory.¹⁸ That is Pelagianism, not Christianity. That's our **second point**: The cause of selfism is in thinking that anything good comes from you.

III. The Contempt of Selfism

Divinely inspired mockery

Please look at v.8 "Now this is one of the few places in the NT where Paul engages in Divinely inspired mockery. Paul is answering the fool according to their own folly. **v.8** "Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! Without us you have become kings! And would that you did reign, so that we might share the rule with you!" Paul is simply saying out loud what they thought of themselves. They were self-satisfied and smug in their spirituality. This is just like how the Laodiceans thought of themselves in **Revelation 3:17** "For you say, I am rich, I have prospered, and I need nothing, not realizing that

¹⁷ See §8 in Edwards for a lesser to greater argument. If God was jealous for Herod stealing the glory for a little eloquence (Acts 12:32), how much more will He be jealous if we take credit for the blood bought grace that He has worked in us? Edwards, pg. 544

¹⁸ Furthermore, the person who thinks that doesn't owe any thanks to God—Edwards, pg. 548

you are wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked.” They were so arrogant that they even thought they had achieved these things without the apostles. Notice the middle of the verse. “Without us you have become kings!” This reflected how much their pagan culture had influenced them. Plutarch said these were the claims of the Stoic philosophers “[in] their sect the wise man is [called] not only prudent and just and brave, but also an orator, a poet, a general, a rich man, and a king.”¹⁹ The Corinthians were mixing Christ with pagan philosophy and the gospel became a worldly philosophy, a worldly means of promoting one’s self above others.

God exhibited the apostles

But then Paul cuts away from the sarcasm for a moment. Look at the end of v.8 “And would that you did reign, [in other words, I wished that you really were exalted] *so that* we might share the rule with you!” Why would Paul say that? v.9 “For [because] I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all, like men sentenced to death, because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.” John MacArthur says here

“When a Roman general won a major victory it was celebrated by what was called a triumph. The general would enter the city in great military splendor, leading his officers and troops. Behind those would come a group of prisoners in chains, with the conquered king and his officers prominently displayed for all to see and mock. The prisoners were under the sentence of death and would be taken to the arena to fight wild beasts.”²⁰

That’s what Paul is alluding to here. He says at the end of v.8 “...we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.” Spectacle is θέατρον theatron in Greek, where we get the word theater. What do you do at a theater?

¹⁹ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 180

²⁰ John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary: 1 Corinthians*, (Chicago, IL.: Moody Publishers, 1984), pg. 110

You watch a show. Paul is saying that they were *the show* not only for the world of men but even for the angels in Heaven. But notice who is putting on the show! Beginning of v.8 "...God has exhibited us..." 'God put us on display. God is drawing attention to us.' But not in the way that the Corinthians would have liked. That's why Paul is drawing their attention to this. The apostles were like the gladiators that were condemned to fight in the games or to be fed to the lions.

The theater of Christ's sufferings

Here's the most important question in this last section: **why would God put His apostles on display like this?** Why would He put them in a theater in which they suffered so? This is such a vital question for you to be able to answer because it is the reason you exist. Why doesn't God just rapture us up to Heaven once we get saved? Why does He leave us here? We know the Father loves us. We know that it is the Father's good pleasure to give us the kingdom. Why doesn't He just bring us home? Because He wants to tell a story with our lives, He want us to be on display in His theater. What are we displaying? The Lord Jesus Christ.

Fools for Christ's sake

Please look at v.9. Paul gets to very heart of the Corinthian problem. The apostles suffered for the sake of Christ, but the Corinthians held contempt for such a lifestyle. The gospel wasn't supposed to bring suffering, it was meant to bring triumph. v.9 "We are fools *for Christ's sake*, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute." The Corinthians had adopted a prosperity gospel of sorts. The Christ they had fashioned allowed them to hold on to their worldly reputations. They held contempt for anything that would make them look foolish or weak or disreputable to the world. But Paul is saying this is *precisely* why God has them on display! "We are fools *for Christ's sake*." What does that mean? It means the purpose of everything the Apostle's did and the purpose for everything they

suffered was so that the Lord Jesus Christ would be made known, and adored in the world. That is God's chief concern, that all attention would be drawn to His Son. He is the bright and morning star. He is the desire of the nations. He is the Alpha and Omega. Everything is dust and refuse compared to Him. He must have all the preeminence. Life is nothing and less than nothing without Him. All is vanity without Jesus Christ in the world.

It was for Christ's sake that the Apostle Paul was called to be an apostle. **Acts 9:16** "For I will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name."

It is for Christ's sake that Christians will be called to account before kings and politicians. **Luke 21:12** "But before all this they will lay their hands on you and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues and prisons, and you will be brought before kings and governors for my name's sake."

It is for Christ's sake that martyrs will shed their blood. **Romans 8:36** "As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all the day long; we are regarded as sheep to be slaughtered.'"

Dear congregation this is the reason you exist. You don't exist to make a lot of money. You don't exist to have big families, or to stay single and live free. You don't exist for the sake of your own comfort. All of those things in themselves are not bad. But if those are your main goals in life, then you are entrenched in the religion of selfism. You don't live for yourself. You are God's theater. You live for Christ's sake. You live to put Him on display.

Paul's resume of Christ

Notice the specific way that Paul says he and the other apostles display Christ. **v.11-13** "To the present hour we hunger and thirst, we are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we

entreat. We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.” Can you see the gospel here? Can you see how Paul’s life is meant to help us see Christ more?

Paul says he had hunger and thirst. Who was it that had thirst on the cross so that we would never be thirsty again?

Paul says was buffeted, that is, he was repeatedly struck.²¹ In **2 Corinthians 11:24-25** he says “Five times I received at the hands of the Jews the forty lashes less one. Three times I was beaten with rods.” Loved ones, Who was crushed for our iniquities? Who was wounded so we could be healed?

Paul says he was poor and homeless. Who left the riches of Heaven and became poor, so that we might become rich?

Paul says he worked with his own hands. He didn’t receive any support from the Corinthian Church. (**1 Corinthians 9:15**) Loved ones, Christ didn’t receive any help in His work of salvation. The only thing we contributed was the sin that nailed Him to the cross.

And then Paul mentions this triplet at the end of v.12 “When reviled, we bless; when persecuted, we endure; when slandered, we entreat.” Who is that but Christ? “Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do” (**Luke 23:24**)

Paul then ends with the worst thing he could say about himself and the other Apostles. v.13 “We have become, and are still, like the scum of the world, the refuse of all things.” One commentator said these insults “border on foul language...the apostle’s were the scrapings from everyone’s shoes.”²² They were the dung of the earth. Beloved Who was the most despised and rejected among

²¹ Ciampa & Rosner, pg. 183

²² *ibid*, pg. 185

men? Who became the most despicable thing in this universe—the embodiment of our sin? Nailed to cross outside the city gates where everything unclean and unwanted went to be forgotten.

Don't you see? Paul's resume is Christ's resume. He lived for Christ's sake, not for his own. That's Paul's message to the Corinthians. You don't live to make much of yourselves, you live to make much of Christ. And that is Paul's message to us. Are we self-satisfied and self-indulgent Christians like the Corinthians? Have we adopted their religion of selfism—willing to have Jesus as long as it doesn't cost us any comfort or sacrifice. Who is our God? Self or Christ? Loved ones, don't you see that living for Christ's sake, willing to suffer for Him, willing to be a fool for Him is the most free life you can live? To have no other Master than He? Not to be enslaved to the world, but to be a slave of Him? He who knows all your wickedness, and yet loves you anyways. He who has promised to never leave you nor forsake you. Will you not live for Him? Will you not make your life a theater that shows Jesus?

To those who still belong to the world

Perhaps you are here this morning and the idea of living for Jesus Christ is ridiculous to you. You view Jesus as the world does, because you belong to the world. The Scripture calls you a fool. What would it profit you if you gained all the world's accolades yet lost your soul? Who cares what the world thinks of you? Will that help you when you stand before God on the day of judgment? No God will be against you. God hates the proud. And you are arrogant if you think you can live a life of scoring God. He has commanded you to love Him, honor Him, and worship Him, and you have spent your life living and loving and worshipping yourself. Why will you perish? God will take no pleasure in your punishment. Turn to Him and live. Receive this Jesus that we have been speaking about. He offers Himself to you. "For God so loved the world,^[1] that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world,

but in order that the world might be saved through him. Whoever believes in him is not condemned, but whoever does not believe is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only Son of God” (**John 3:16-18**)

1st principle: boasting in anything but God is self-worship

So we arrive at our **first principle**: boasting in anything but God is self-worship. Notice how Paul made his theological conclusion. All along he has been drawing attention to the fact that they were saying: “I follow Paul” or “I follow Apollos.” But now he concludes by saying ‘the reason why you puff yourself up above your neighbor is because you are worshipping yourselves.’ Human beings either worship the Lord, or they worship themselves, but it is impossible that they don’t worship. When King Saul refused to offer right worship to the Lord in 1 Samuel 15, did he stop worshipping altogether? No, he worshipped himself. v.12 says that “Saul...set up a monument in his own honor.”²³ When King Nebuchadnezzar refused to worship the Lord in Daniel 2, was it because he wasn’t a worshipper? No, in Daniel 3, Nebuchadnezzar set up an image reflecting his own greatness and required that all worship it. There is no such thing as a non-worshipping human. Atheists are *not* non-worshippers. They worship as much as any Christian does. The only difference is that the atheist worships himself.

²³ NIV