

Lovers Of Their Own Selves

Series 1-15

By Paul Tackett

VerseQuest Ministries





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Lovers Of Their Own Selves

A VerseQuest Bible Study Series

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Lovers Of Their Own Selves Bible Study Chart

Introduction to the Series: Lovers Of Their Own Selves

There is a reason the Holy Ghost begins Paul's last-days warning with this phrase: "For men shall be lovers of their own selves" (2 Timothy 3:2). He does not begin with wars, rumors of wars, political corruption, economic collapse, false religion, moral confusion, or open wickedness, though all of those things have their place in the last-days picture. He begins with man in love with himself. That is the root. That is the fountain. That is the crooked spring feeding the stream. When self becomes the center, everything else begins to rot. The home rots because everyone wants to be served. The church rots because Christ is mentioned but man is promoted. Worship rots because the songs turn inward. Preaching rots because sermons become therapy for the flesh instead of truth from the Book. Doctrine rots because people start asking how a verse makes them feel instead of what God said. Relationships rot because every slight becomes an injury, every correction becomes abuse, every disagreement becomes betrayal, and every inconvenience becomes oppression.

This is one of the great sins of the modern age, and the devil has done a masterful job of renaming it. The Bible calls it being "lovers of their own selves." The world calls it self-care, self-love, self-expression, self-discovery, self-affirmation, self-worth, personal truth, protecting your peace, setting boundaries, or living authentically. Now, some words can have a lawful use if they are kept under Scripture, but the spirit behind much of this modern vocabulary is not Bible humility, Bible wisdom, or Bible stewardship. It is self on the throne. It is the old man trying to sound healthy while refusing the cross. It is fallen flesh demanding honor, affirmation, attention, comfort, and obedience. It is man saying, "My will, my way, my feelings, my truth, my identity, my story, my pain, my pleasure, my platform, my glory." The language may be polished, emotional, therapeutic, or even spiritual, but the center has not changed. Self is still sitting where Christ belongs.

This problem is not limited to the lost world. The lost world is expected to love itself. "They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh" (Romans 8:5). What makes the issue so dangerous is that this same spirit has marched into professing Christianity and found a comfortable seat. It has entered pulpits, worship teams, counseling rooms, youth ministries, books, conferences, testimonies, podcasts, social media platforms, and church growth strategies. It has trained people to treat Jesus Christ as the divine helper of their dreams rather than the Lord who says, "deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). It has trained worshippers to measure a song by how it makes them feel rather than whether it exalts God in spirit and in truth. It has trained church members to judge sermons by whether they felt affirmed rather than whether they were corrected by Scripture. It has trained preachers to speak about Jesus while building their own image. It

has trained believers to confuse identity in Christ with religious self-admiration. That is a mess, and it is not a small mess. It is the mess Paul warned about.

The Bible is not silent about this. It names the disease, shows the symptoms, traces the root, exposes the disguises, and gives the remedy. Self-love becomes boasting and pride. “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud” (2 Timothy 3:2). Self-love becomes self-will. “Presumptuous are they, selfwilled” (2 Peter 2:10). Self-love becomes vainglory. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory” (Philippians 2:3). Self-love becomes love of praise. “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43). Self-love becomes human wisdom. “Be not wise in thine own eyes” (Proverbs 3:7). Self-love becomes pleasure-love. “Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4). The Bible does not flatter the sinner by telling him he needs more self-admiration. It tells him the truth: self is already too large, too loud, too stubborn, too hungry, too proud, and too ready to replace God.

That is why this series is necessary. It does not merely complain about the world. It brings the matter before the judgment seat of Scripture. It shows that the spirit of self-love is not just a cultural annoyance or generational trend. It is a doctrinal, prophetic, and spiritual issue. It is a last-days mark. It is connected to pride, rebellion, corrupted worship, false preaching, religious celebrity, emotional manipulation, identity obsession, and pleasure-driven Christianity. It explains why people cannot receive correction. It explains why churches can be full and still shallow. It explains why so many worship songs sound more like emotional self-talk than adoration of God. It explains why professing Christians can be obsessed with being seen, validated, affirmed, and understood while having little appetite for holiness, surrender, chastening, doctrine, or the fear of the Lord.

But this series is not written merely to diagnose the sickness. A doctor who only names the disease and never gives the remedy has not finished his work. The Bible gives the remedy, and the remedy is not self-hatred, emotional collapse, monastic misery, or pretending that a saved person has no value, duty, gifts, or standing in Christ. The remedy is the cross. The remedy is the mind of Christ. The remedy is biblical humility. The remedy is Christ having the preeminence. The remedy is “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). The Lord Jesus Christ did not say, “If any man will come after me, let him discover himself.” He said, “let him deny himself.” Paul did not say, “I am improved with Christ.” He said, “I am crucified with Christ.” The Christian life is not self repaired and then enthroned again. It is the old man judged at the cross and the life of Christ manifested through the believer.

That distinction must be kept clear. The answer to self-love is not walking around with fake humility, acting worthless so people will tell you that you are not. That is still self-centered. The answer is not hating the person God saved, neglecting proper responsibilities, or

despising lawful blessings. The answer is putting self in its proper place under the Lord Jesus Christ. The old man is not to be trusted. The flesh is not to be followed. The heart is not to be enthroned. Feelings are not doctrine. Wounds are not authority. Pleasure is not lord. Identity is not the gospel. A platform is not proof of spiritual weight. Applause is not the praise of God. The believer is bought with a price. His body and spirit belong to God. Therefore, he is to glorify God, not self.

This series will move through the anatomy of this sin step by step. It begins with the last-days religion of self and the forgotten command to deny yourself. It traces the throne of self back to Lucifer's "I will" rebellion and exposes the gospel of self that turns the cross into a mirror. It shows how worship turns inward, how churches can revolve around personalities and brands, how praise becomes an addiction, how boasting and pride reveal a swollen heart, how self-will resists God's government, how vainglory corrupts service, how human wisdom replaces Scripture, how identity becomes a religion, how pleasure becomes an idol, and how esteeming others better restores the mind of Christ. Finally, it ends where every honest treatment of self must end: crucified with Christ.

The goal is simple: to put the King James Bible back over the mirror. The mirror says, "Look at yourself." The Bible says, "Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith" (Hebrews 12:2). The mirror says, "Love yourself." The Bible says, "deny himself." The mirror says, "Trust your heart." The Bible says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26). The mirror says, "Follow your truth." The Bible says, "thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The mirror says, "Protect your glory." The Bible says, "God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). The mirror says, "You are the center." The Bible says Christ is the head of the body, "that in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

So this is not a light series. This is not a trendy series. This is not a self-help series. This is a Bible series on one of the master sins of the last days. It is a warning to the world, but it is also a rebuke to professing Christians who have let the spirit of the age teach them how to think, worship, speak, serve, lead, and feel. It is a call to get self off the throne, get Christ back in the center, get the Book back over the heart, get the cross back into discipleship, and get the mind of Christ back into the church. The world has preached self long enough. The church has borrowed its language long enough. It is time to let the Bible speak. And the Bible's answer is plain: not self enthroned, not self discovered, not self celebrated, but "yet not I, but Christ."

1 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - The Last Days Religion Of Self

The first thing the Holy Ghost puts in the list is not murder, drunkenness, atheism, adultery, or sodomy. He starts with this: “For men shall be lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2). That ought to stop a Bible believer in his tracks. When Paul describes “perilous times” in the last days, he does not begin with what the world always points at. He begins with a man in love with himself. That is the root. That is the fountain. That is the filthy spring out of which the rest of the stream flows. A man who loves himself above God will eventually become covetous, boastful, proud, blasphemous, unthankful, unholy, without natural affection, trucebreaker, false accuser, incontinent, fierce, despiser of those that are good, traitor, heady, highminded, and a lover of pleasures more than a lover of God. The Bible does not treat self-love as a harmless emotional imbalance. It treats it as a last-days spiritual disease. It is not merely a social trend, a counseling category, or a personality type. It is a prophetic condition of mankind when God is pushed out and self climbs into the throne.

We are watching a generation build a religion around the mirror. The world says love yourself, affirm yourself, defend yourself, express yourself, forgive yourself, believe in yourself, protect your peace, follow your truth, and celebrate your identity. Then the church, instead of rebuking the madness, starts borrowing the vocabulary. Sermons become therapy sessions. Worship songs become emotional self-talk. Testimonies become personal branding. Pastors become celebrities. Ministries become platforms. The cross becomes a motivational logo. Jesus becomes a life coach who exists to help men fulfill their dreams. The Bible becomes a collection of inspirational slogans to make flesh feel better about itself. But the Lord Jesus Christ never said, “If any man will come after me, let him discover himself.” He said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). That is not the language of self-esteem. That is the language of execution.

This series begins where Paul begins, with the last-days religion of self. It is not enough to complain that the world is selfish. The real danger is when selfishness gets baptized, dressed up, given a microphone, and called Christianity. It is one thing when a lost man lives for himself. That is expected. “They that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh” (Romans 8:5). But when churches train saved people to stare inward, sing inward, preach inward, brand inward, and interpret God through their feelings, then something

deeper is happening. That is no longer just weakness. That is a counterfeit spiritual system. It has a Bible in one hand and a mirror in the other. It says Jesus is Lord, but self gets the attention. It says God is worthy, but man becomes the subject. It uses Christian words while shifting the center from Christ to the creature. And once that happens, the whole structure is rotten no matter how polished it looks under the lights.

Chapter 1: The First Mark Of Perilous Times

Paul writes, “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come” (2 Timothy 3:1). He does not say maybe they will come. He does not say they might come if society gets bad enough. He says they “shall come.” The word “perilous” means dangerous, grievous, hard to bear, and spiritually treacherous. These are not merely inconvenient times. These are times where the air itself is poisoned with the spirit of rebellion. And immediately after that warning, Paul gives the first description: “For men shall be lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2). That is the opening diagnosis. Before the list branches out into many visible sins, the Spirit of God identifies the inward corruption: man loves himself. Self-love is not the last item in the collapse. It is the first domino.

That matters because most people misdiagnose the age. They say the problem is politics, education, economics, social media, parenting, technology, entertainment, or poor mental health. Those things may be involved, but they are not the root. The root is spiritual. Man has fallen in love with man. The creature admires the creature. Flesh worships flesh. The old nature has built a temple to itself. When that happens, every other sin becomes easier to justify. Covetousness becomes “I deserve more.” Pride becomes “I need confidence.” Rebellion becomes “I am setting boundaries.” Fornication becomes “I am following my heart.” Blasphemy becomes “I am questioning toxic religion.” Unthankfulness becomes “I am recognizing my worth.” Bitterness becomes “I am protecting my peace.” The same old sins get new packaging, and a generation that cannot endure sound doctrine swallows them whole.

The Bible is not surprised by any of this. The Holy Ghost wrote the headline before the newspapers printed the symptoms. “For men shall be lovers of their own selves.” That phrase explains the pulpit full of motivational speeches. It explains churches that carefully avoid anything that wounds the ego. It explains worship music that keeps circling around

feelings. It explains Christians who cannot receive rebuke. It explains young people trained from childhood to believe every emotion deserves reverence. It explains older people who never grew beyond themselves. It explains ministries where the name of Christ is present, but the spirit of self is dominant. When self becomes the interpretive center, everything gets bent around it. Bible verses are read through self. Church attendance is judged by self. Marriage is evaluated by self. Worship is measured by self. Doctrine is accepted or rejected by self. That is perilous because a man who makes himself the center will eventually make God revolve around him.

Chapter 2: The Religion That Begins With The Mirror

The religion of self begins every morning at the mirror. It does not necessarily deny God. It simply asks God to stand behind self and bless what self already wanted. That is more subtle than atheism. Atheism says there is no God. The religion of self says there is a God, but His chief business is to improve my life, heal my wounds, protect my emotions, advance my dreams, increase my influence, and make me feel significant. That is not Bible Christianity. That is a man-centered counterfeit wearing Christian perfume. The Bible says, "The LORD hath made all things for himself" (Proverbs 16:4). The self-religion says God made all things for me. The Bible says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power" (Revelation 4:11). The self-religion says man is worthy of endless affirmation.

This is why so much modern preaching sounds like a therapy clinic with a cross on the wall. There is a constant emphasis on how special you are, how valuable you are, how powerful your destiny is, how nobody can stop your assignment, how God is about to elevate you, and how your haters are only proof you are important. That language flatters the old man. It does not crucify him. It does not bring a sinner to the dust before a holy God. It does not make a saint say, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (Romans 7:24). It makes him say, "I am amazing, and God is lucky to have me on the team." That is not apostolic Christianity. Paul said, "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief" (1 Timothy 1:15). He did not build his doctrine around self-celebration. He built it around grace shown to an undeserving sinner.

The mirror religion is especially dangerous because it can quote Bible verses. It can quote "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Philippians 4:13), while

ignoring Paul's contentment in suffering. It can quote "I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14), while ignoring repentance, holiness, and obedience. It can quote "we are more than conquerors" (Romans 8:37), while refusing to mention tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, peril, and sword. That is how self-love handles Scripture. It clips out the phrases that make self feel strong and skips the verses that put self under judgment. But the word of God is not a scrapbook for human ego. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Notice the order. Doctrine, reproof, correction, instruction. The religion of self wants comfort without correction, promises without precepts, blessings without obedience, and glory without a cross.

Chapter 3: Christ Did Not Preach Self Love

The Lord Jesus Christ is the death blow to the self-love gospel. He said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself" (Luke 9:23). That one sentence destroys a library full of modern religious psychology. The first requirement of discipleship is not self-discovery. It is self-denial. The Lord did not say deny your potential, deny your responsibility, deny the truth, or deny the grace of God. He said deny "himself." That means the old man is not to be flattered, fed, excused, enthroned, or turned into a ministry brand. He is to be refused. When self rises up and says, "I want," the cross says, "deny." When self says, "I feel," Scripture says, "believe God." When self says, "I deserve," grace says, "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). When self says, "I must be seen," Christ says, "follow me."

The cross is not jewelry for a self-centered life. It is an instrument of death. Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). There is the Christian life in one verse. "Yet not I." That is the phrase the modern church cannot stand. Modern religion says, "Yet I." Yet my calling. Yet my platform. Yet my trauma. Yet my identity. Yet my feelings. Yet my story. Yet my purpose. Yet my greatness. Paul says, "yet not I." That does not mean the believer ceases to exist or becomes useless. It means the old self is no longer the center, master, object, and aim. Christ lives in the believer. Christ gets the preeminence. Christ supplies the life. Christ receives the glory. The Christian is not called to polish the old man but to reckon him dead. "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11).

This is where modern Christianity has gone soft. It wants resurrection power without crucifixion. It wants the benefits of Christ while preserving the throne of self. It wants to sing about surrender while never surrendering anything. It wants to talk about following Jesus while negotiating every command against personal comfort. But Jesus never marketed discipleship as self-improvement. He said, "Whosoever will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me" (Mark 8:34). Then He added, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it" (Mark 8:35). That is not the language of self-love. That is the language of a life lost for Christ. A man can either save his life for self or lose it for Christ, but he cannot do both at the same time.

Chapter 4: The Self Centered Pulpit

One of the clearest signs of the last-days religion of self is the self-centered pulpit. The pulpit was never meant to be a stage for a man to display himself. It was meant to be a place where the word of God is opened, Christ is preached, sinners are warned, saints are fed, doctrine is established, and the flesh is cut down. Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:2). That command is not complicated. Preach the word. Reprove. Rebuke. Exhort. Doctrine. But the very next verse says, "For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine" (2 Timothy 4:3). That time has come with a smile on its face and a fog machine behind it.

The self-centered pulpit does not always deny the Bible. Sometimes it simply replaces preaching with religious motivational speaking. It becomes a weekly lecture on destiny, dreams, leadership, emotional healing, success, confidence, increase, influence, and personal breakthrough. The preacher may quote a verse, but the sermon is not governed by the verse. The Bible becomes the decoration, not the foundation. The congregation is not taught to tremble at the word. They are taught to feel better about themselves. They are not told, "Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith" (2 Corinthians 13:5). They are told, "You are stronger than you think." They are not warned, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked" (Jeremiah 17:9). They are told, "Follow your heart." They are not brought to "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ" (Acts 20:21). They are brought to a better self-image.

A Bible preacher does not exist to flatter flesh. He exists to preach truth whether men clap or walk away. Paul asked, “for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). That verse should be branded on every pulpit in the country. The preacher who must please men cannot serve Christ faithfully. If his ministry depends on protecting everybody’s ego, he will soon learn to avoid the verses that bite. He will stop preaching on sin, judgment, hell, separation, chastisement, holiness, pride, worldliness, and false doctrine. He will become a religious salesman. But God did not call men to sell self-help with Bible verses attached. He called them to preach the word. And the word of God does not bow before man’s self-esteem. It is “quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). A sword does not ask the flesh how it feels before it cuts.

Chapter 5: Worship Turned Inward

Worship is another place where the religion of self has spread like leaven. The Lord said, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). True worship is directed toward God according to truth. It is not merely a mood, a sound, a swell of emotion, or a room full of people singing the same sentence until they feel something. Worship is not measured by chills running down the spine. It is measured by whether God is honored in truth. The issue is not just whether a song is old or new. An old song can be shallow, and a new song can contain truth. The issue is direction. Who is the subject? Who is being magnified? What is being taught? Is Christ being exalted, or is self being emotionally stroked in religious language?

There was a time when much Christian singing made a man look up. It sang of the blood, the cross, the resurrection, the second coming, the holiness of God, the grace of Christ, the power of the Scriptures, the hope of heaven, and the need to surrender. Now much of it makes a man look inward. How I feel. How loved I am. How chosen I am. How valuable I am. How God sees me. How God fights for me. How God is obsessed with me. There is truth, of course, that God loves His people. There is truth that the believer is accepted in the beloved. “He hath made us accepted in the beloved” (Ephesians 1:6). But when the constant focus becomes the worshipper’s emotional experience rather than the worthiness of God, worship has curved inward. It may still use the name of Jesus, but self has become the emotional center.

The danger is not emotion itself. Bible worship can involve tears, joy, trembling, shouting, singing, thanksgiving, and rejoicing. The danger is emotion ruling truth. The danger is songs becoming spiritual narcotics that soothe self without sanctifying the saint. The danger is training people to judge worship by what it does to them instead of whether it honors God. David said, "Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of holiness" (Psalm 29:2). Glory is due unto His name, not ours. Holiness is part of worship, not an optional extra. When worship becomes a mirror, it flatters self. When worship becomes biblical, it bows before God. The church does not need more self-referential anthems. It needs truth-filled singing that puts Christ back in the center and leaves the flesh no room to boast.

Chapter 6: The Home And The Training Of Self

The religion of self does not begin only in pulpits and music. It begins in homes. Paul's list includes "disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy" (2 Timothy 3:2). That is not an accident. A child trained to believe his feelings are supreme will not suddenly become humble when he turns eighteen. A home that never teaches self-denial helps produce a generation that cannot endure correction, disappointment, authority, or delayed gratification. The Bible says, "Foolishness is bound in the heart of a child" (Proverbs 22:15). It does not say divinity is bound in the heart of a child. It does not say children are naturally pure little prophets whose desires must be obeyed. It says foolishness is bound there. That means parenting is not supposed to enthrone the child's will. It is supposed to train it under God.

We have watched a culture shift from correcting children to worshipping them. Every feeling must be affirmed. Every preference must be honored. Every tantrum must be interpreted. Every desire must be validated. Then the church wonders why young people cannot sit under preaching, cannot receive rebuke, cannot submit to authority, cannot handle "no," and cannot separate their emotions from truth. The Bible says, "Chasten thy son while there is hope" (Proverbs 19:18). It also says, "The rod and reproof give wisdom: but a child left to himself bringeth his mother to shame" (Proverbs 29:15). Notice that phrase: "left to himself." That is the religion of self in seed form. Leave a man to himself, and he does not naturally grow into holiness. Leave a child to himself, and he does not

naturally become wise. Self must be governed, corrected, instructed, and brought under authority.

This does not mean harshness, cruelty, or provoking children to wrath. The Bible says, “And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath” (Ephesians 6:4). But the same verse says, “bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.” Nurture and admonition go together. Love and correction go together. Grace and truth go together. Modern self-love hates that balance. It wants affection without admonition, acceptance without truth, and affirmation without discipline. But God’s love includes chastisement. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6). If God’s love corrects His children, then a religion that refuses correction is not more loving than God. It is less biblical than God. A home that trains self to rule will produce adults who expect God, church, marriage, work, and society to bow before their feelings.

Chapter 7: The Biblical Cure Is Christ Preeminent

The cure for the last-days religion of self is not self-hatred. That is an important distinction. The Bible does not command a man to despise the fact that God made him, nor does it command a believer to neglect proper responsibility, stewardship, health, family, work, or necessary rest. The cure for self-love is not a theatrical misery where a man pretends to be humble while constantly talking about how humble he is. The cure is Christ having the preeminence. “That in all things he might have the preeminence” (Colossians 1:18). Not self. Not the pastor. Not the platform. Not the singer. Not the influencer. Not the movement. Not the denomination. Not the emotional experience. Christ. If Christ is preeminent, self is dethroned.

Paul gives the mind that cures vainglory in Philippians 2. He says, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). Then he points straight to the Lord Jesus Christ: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). The answer to self-love is the mind of Christ. He “made himself of no reputation” (Philippians 2:7). That phrase alone would wreck half the modern ministry world if anyone believed it. No reputation. Not reputation management. Not branding. Not platform protection. Not image cultivation. The

Lord humbled Himself. He took the form of a servant. He became obedient unto death. The Son of God moved downward in humility while sinful men scramble upward for recognition.

That is the path the flesh hates. The flesh wants to be admired, defended, promoted, understood, praised, and obeyed. The Spirit of God points to a crucified Saviour and says, "Walk ye in him" (Colossians 2:6). The Christian life is not the enthronement of self with Jesus as the chaplain. It is the life of Christ in the believer. Paul said, "For to me to live is Christ" (Philippians 1:21). He did not say, "For to me to live is self-expression." He did not say, "For to me to live is personal destiny." He did not say, "For to me to live is emotional fulfillment." He said Christ. That is where this whole thing lands. If Christ is life, self cannot be lord. If Christ is preeminent, self cannot be central. If Christ is the treasure, self cannot be the idol. The religion of self dies where the real Christ is preached, believed, obeyed, and loved.

Conclusion

The last-days religion of self is not coming. It is here. It is in the culture, but worse, it is in the church. It has entered through soft preaching, inward worship, therapeutic doctrine, celebrity platforms, emotion-driven spirituality, identity obsession, and the refusal to let Scripture correct the heart. Paul warned us plainly: "For men shall be lovers of their own selves" (2 Timothy 3:2). The phrase is not vague. It is not hard to understand. It is a direct description of a generation that worships at the altar of self while still using religious language when convenient. The peril is not merely that men love pleasure, praise, money, or power. The peril begins deeper than that. Men love themselves. And once self is loved supremely, everything else must serve it, including God, church, Bible, family, and truth.

The Lord Jesus Christ stands against this whole system with one command: "deny himself." That command has not expired. It has not been revised by modern psychology. It has not been replaced by motivational preaching. It has not been softened by church growth experts. The cross still says what it always said. Self must come down. Self must be denied. Self must not govern the believer. The old man is not to be decorated and platformed. He is to be reckoned dead. "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him" (Romans 6:6). The Christian life is not self improved, self affirmed, self celebrated, and self fulfilled. It is Christ living in a redeemed sinner who has been bought with a price.

“Ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20).

So the first essay in this series lays the axe at the root. This is not a minor issue. This is the foundation of the age’s deception. A church can have lights, music, crowds, programs, branding, books, podcasts, conferences, and a thousand testimonies and still be rotten if Christ is not the center. A believer can know the vocabulary of grace and still live as though self were god. The answer is not to talk about humility while secretly craving praise. The answer is to get back under the authority of the King James Bible, let the Holy Ghost cut through the lies, put Christ back where He belongs, and say with Paul, “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). The world says love yourself. The Lord says deny yourself. One leads to perilous times. The other leads to a crucified life where Jesus Christ gets the glory.

2 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - The Command Modern Christianity Forgot

The Lord Jesus Christ did not hide the cost of following Him. He did not whisper it in a corner. He did not package it in soft religious language so the flesh could feel comfortable while pretending to be spiritual. He said plainly, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). There it is, one of the clearest commands in the New Testament and one of the most ignored commands in modern Christianity. The Lord did not say, “Let him discover himself.” He did not say, “Let him affirm himself.” He did not say, “Let him build his brand, protect his emotional kingdom, and use God to achieve his personal dreams.” He said, “let him deny himself.” That single phrase cuts across the whole spirit of the age. It cuts across modern counseling language, pulpit flattery, self-esteem religion, celebrity Christianity, worship songs built around the worshipper’s feelings, and the entire system that teaches man to put himself in the center while attaching the name of Jesus to the process.

This command is forgotten because it is offensive to the flesh. The flesh loves a Jesus who heals, feeds, blesses, comforts, promotes, vindicates, and elevates. The flesh does not love a Jesus who says, “deny himself.” The old man wants to be included in the Christian life, not crucified. He wants to be improved, admired, healed, understood, platformed, and given religious vocabulary. But the Bible does not offer the old man a throne. It offers him a cross. Paul wrote, “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him” (Romans 6:6). That is not the language of self-help. That is not the language of personal branding. That is not

the language of motivational religion. The old man is not God's renovation project. He is sentenced. He is not to be enthroned in the name of grace. He is to be reckoned dead in the light of the cross. "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11).

That is why this essay belongs near the beginning of the series. Before we expose self-centered worship, self-centered pulpits, self-centered homes, self-centered identities, and self-centered church culture, we must put the words of the Lord Jesus Christ on the table. "Deny himself." That is the command modern Christianity forgot. It did not forget how to build platforms. It did not forget how to run conferences. It did not forget how to publish books, stream services, polish stages, build brands, and create emotional experiences. But in many places it forgot how to tell a man that his biggest problem is not that he has failed to love himself enough. His problem is that he loves himself too much already. Paul said, "For men shall be lovers of their own selves" (2 Timothy 3:2). Jesus gave the cure before the disease filled the age: deny self, take up the cross daily, and follow Him.

Chapter 1: The Command Begins With Any Man

The Lord begins with the words, "If any man will come after me" (Luke 9:23). That phrase is broad, plain, and universal. It is not reserved for apostles only. It is not reserved for missionaries, preachers, martyrs, pastors, or some special class of advanced Christians. "Any man" means any man. That includes the man in the pew, the woman in the home, the teenager on the phone, the preacher behind the pulpit, the singer on the stage, the businessman at work, the student in the classroom, and the believer trying to live for God in a crooked and perverse nation. The Lord gives one road for all who would come after Him. Nobody gets a private exemption. Nobody gets to follow Christ while keeping self as lord. Nobody gets to walk behind the Saviour while dragging a throne for the flesh.

This matters because modern Christianity has created a kind of discipleship without denial. It tells people they can come after Jesus while keeping their personal kingdom intact. They can keep their pride, their bitterness, their ambition, their wounded ego, their appetite for praise, their rebellion against correction, their obsession with identity, and their refusal to submit to Scripture, as long as they add some Christian phrases on top. That is not what Jesus said. "If any man will come after me" is not an invitation to add Christ as an accessory. It is a summons to follow Him as Lord. The man who comes after Christ does not get to set the terms. The Saviour sets the terms. The disciple does not negotiate the cross. He takes it up. The follower does not instruct the Master how much self can remain. The Master says, "deny himself."

The words “come after me” also show direction. The Christian life is not Christ coming after our dreams. It is us coming after Christ. That is a massive difference. Much of modern religion reverses the order. It presents Jesus as the divine helper chasing after man’s agenda, man’s destiny, man’s purpose, man’s vision, man’s emotional needs, and man’s success story. But Jesus did not say, “I will come after your dreams.” He said, “If any man will come after me.” The direction is Christward. The goal is Christ. The pattern is Christ. The authority is Christ. The glory belongs to Christ. Paul said, “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul was not calling men to admire Paul. He was pointing them to a pattern of following Christ. The modern church has too many people asking Christ to follow them and too few people willing to follow Christ.

Chapter 2: Let Him Deny Himself

The first command is not “let him express himself.” It is “let him deny himself.” That is where the knife goes in. Biblical Christianity begins by telling self no. Not God no. Not Scripture no. Not correction no. Not the preacher no. Not the brother who loves you enough to rebuke you no. Self no. The old man does not like that. He wants to be affirmed. He wants every feeling interpreted as truth. He wants every wound treated as authority. He wants every desire baptized as calling. He wants every ambition labeled as vision. But the Lord says the first movement of discipleship is denial. If self is driving, Christ is not being followed. If self is ruling, the cross is being avoided. If self is the center, the Lord is being used, not obeyed.

Self-denial is not self-hatred. That needs to be said clearly because the modern crowd will twist the doctrine before the ink dries. The Bible is not telling a man to despise the fact that God made him, neglect his responsibilities, abandon his family, destroy his health, or wallow in some theatrical misery. Self-denial is not refusing to eat, sleep, work, care for your body, provide for your household, or thank God for legitimate blessings. The Bible says, “no man ever yet hated his own flesh; but nourisheth and cherisheth it” (Ephesians 5:29). Proper stewardship is not the enemy. Self-worship is the enemy. Biblical self-denial is the refusal to let the old man, the flesh, the ego, the appetite, the ambition, the resentment, the lust, the fear, and the pride govern the life. It is the dethroning of self so Christ can rule.

This is where the modern self-love gospel is exposed as fraud. It diagnoses man’s problem backward. It says man is broken because he has not loved himself enough. The Bible says man is ruined because he loved himself against God. “All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way” (Isaiah 53:6). That is the old problem: “his own way.” Self wants its own way. Self wants its own truth. Self wants its own glory. Self wants its own explanation. Self wants its own excuse. Self wants its own emotional throne. The

Lord does not say, “Make peace with that.” He says, “deny himself.” If that sounds severe, it is because the cross is severe. Grace saves freely, but discipleship does not flatter the old man. The grace that saves a sinner also teaches him “that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly” (Titus 2:12).

Chapter 3: Take Up His Cross Daily

The Lord did not stop at denial. He said, “and take up his cross daily” (Luke 9:23). A cross is not a decoration. It is not a necklace, a logo, a tattoo, a church design, or a sentimental religious object. In the first-century world, a cross meant death, shame, rejection, suffering, and public execution. When the Lord told a man to take up his cross, He was not telling him to carry a mild inconvenience. People today say, “This is my cross to bear” when they mean a difficult coworker, a physical problem, a family irritation, or a personal burden. But in the Bible, the cross is not merely trouble. The cross is death to self under the will of God. The cross says the old life is condemned. The cross says self-rule is over. The cross says the flesh does not get the final word.

Notice the word “daily.” That ruins the flesh’s favorite loophole. Self-denial is not a one-time emotional moment at an altar. It is not a dramatic decision made during a conference, followed by six months of self-worship with religious music in the background. The Lord said daily. That means the old man must be dealt with in the morning, in the afternoon, at night, in conversation, in temptation, in marriage, in parenting, in work, in ministry, in suffering, in success, and in disappointment. A man does not graduate from needing the cross. The flesh does not become holy because it got older. The ego does not become safe because it learned Bible vocabulary. The old nature does not become spiritual because it found a ministry position. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh” (John 3:6). Flesh remains flesh, whether it is in a barroom or behind a pulpit.

This daily cross is why real Christianity cannot be built on feelings. Feelings change by the hour. The cross does not. Feelings say, “I deserve better.” The cross says, “deny himself.” Feelings say, “I need to be seen.” The cross says, “made himself of no reputation” (Philippians 2:7). Feelings say, “I cannot forgive.” The cross says, “forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Ephesians 4:32). Feelings say, “I will not submit.” The cross says, “submit yourselves therefore to God” (James 4:7). Feelings say, “I am the exception.” The cross says, “daily.” The believer who will not take up his cross daily will eventually build doctrines around his disobedience. He will find teachers to validate it, songs to soothe it, friends to excuse it, and online voices to call it healing. But the Lord’s command remains fixed: “take up his cross daily.”

Chapter 4: Follow Me

The command ends with the simplest words and the hardest life: “follow me” (Luke 9:23). Christianity is not merely turning away from self. It is turning toward Christ. Self-denial without following Christ can become religious pride, monkish misery, or man-made discipline. The Lord did not say, “deny yourself and wander around proving how serious you are.” He said, “follow me.” Christ is the object. Christ is the path. Christ is the pattern. Christ is the shepherd. Christ is the captain. Christ is the head. If denial empties the throne, following Christ puts the rightful King there. A man is not called to be a hollow shell of religious negativity. He is called to walk after the Lord.

This is where Paul’s statement matters: “Be ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul could say that because his life did not point men to self-exaltation. He said, “But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). He said, “For to me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). He said, “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31). He said, “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). Paul’s Christianity was not built around self-discovery. It was built around Christ, the cross, the gospel, the ministry, the saints, and the glory of God. He did not call men to follow his personality. He called them to follow the pattern of a man following Christ.

To follow Christ is to let His word overrule your inner world. That is where much modern Christianity falls apart. People want to follow Jesus as long as Jesus agrees with their emotions. They want to follow Jesus as long as Scripture does not contradict their identity. They want to follow Jesus as long as doctrine does not offend their preferences. But the real Christ speaks with authority. “Why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” (Luke 6:46). That verse burns through the fog. Following Christ means His words matter more than my feelings. His commandments matter more than my convenience. His gospel matters more than my reputation. His glory matters more than my platform. His truth matters more than my story. The modern crowd says, “Follow your heart.” The Bible says, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28:26). The Lord says, “follow me.”

Chapter 5: Self Discovery Is Not Discipleship

One of the great counterfeits of modern religion is the idea that Christianity is mainly a journey of self-discovery. That language sounds harmless until you compare it with the Bible. The apostles did not go into the world telling men to discover themselves. They preached repentance, faith, forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of Christ, judgment to come, and obedience to the gospel. Paul said he testified “repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ” (Acts 20:21). He did not preach repentance toward self-acceptance and faith toward personal destiny. The message was Godward, Christ-centered, and truth-governed. Modern self-discovery religion turns the eyes inward and

calls it spirituality. The Bible turns the sinner to Christ and calls him to walk in newness of life.

Self-discovery often becomes a sanctified excuse to keep digging through the old man as though hidden treasure were buried there. But the Bible is not nearly as impressed with the old man as modern religion is. “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). There is your inner journey without God’s word. Deceitful. Desperately wicked. Unknowable apart from divine judgment. The old heart is not a sacred map to your destiny. It is a crooked instrument that must be searched by God, corrected by Scripture, and brought under the rule of the Spirit. The Christian is not told to spend his life discovering the depths of his old identity. He is told to put off the old man and put on the new. “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22).

This does not mean a believer never examines himself. The Bible says, “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Corinthians 13:5). It says, “Let a man examine himself” (1 Corinthians 11:28). But biblical examination is not self-worship. It is not endless emotional archaeology. It is not rummaging through every feeling and naming it truth. Biblical examination is done under God’s light so sin can be confessed, error corrected, motives judged, and fellowship restored. David prayed, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Psalm 139:23). He did not say, “I search myself so I can validate myself.” He asked God to search him. There is the difference. Self-discovery enthrones the inner man. Biblical self-examination submits the inner man to God.

Chapter 6: Self Affirmation Cannot Replace The Cross

The modern world is obsessed with affirmation. People are told to affirm their worth, affirm their truth, affirm their identity, affirm their feelings, affirm their trauma, affirm their boundaries, affirm their dreams, and affirm their inner voice. Then this language walks into Christianity wearing a choir robe. Suddenly sermons and songs begin to sound like spiritual affirmation exercises. “You are enough.” “You are worthy.” “You are powerful.” “You are unstoppable.” “You are the point.” But the Bible does not preach man’s worthiness as the foundation of salvation. It preaches Christ’s worthiness and God’s grace to sinners. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Revelation 5:12). The Lamb is worthy. The sinner is guilty. Grace saves the guilty because Christ is worthy.

The cross does not affirm the old man. It condemns him. That is not popular, but it is Bible. “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). “Our old man is crucified with him” (Romans 6:6). “They that are Christ’s have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts” (Galatians 5:24). You do not crucify something you are trying to affirm. You crucify

something judged worthy of death. The old man cannot be trusted, promoted, or spiritualized. He can be religious. He can sing. He can preach. He can debate. He can quote verses. He can attend church. He can wear conservative clothes. He can use separated vocabulary. But if he is still ruling, the cross is being bypassed. Religious flesh is still flesh. Polished self is still self. Baptized pride is still pride.

Now, the believer does have blessings in Christ. He is forgiven, justified, sealed, accepted, redeemed, and complete in Christ. Those are glorious truths. But notice the location: in Christ. "To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). The believer's standing is not rooted in self-admiration. It is rooted in Christ's finished work. Modern affirmation says, "Look within and recognize your worth." Bible doctrine says, "Look to Christ and rejoice in His grace." That distinction is everything. A Christian who understands grace does not need to lie about the flesh. He can admit what he was, what he is apart from Christ, and what Christ has done for him. "But by the grace of God I am what I am" (1 Corinthians 15:10). Not by self-affirmation. By grace.

Chapter 7: The Forgotten Command Must Be Restored

The command must be restored because without it Christianity becomes a religious system for strengthening the old man. If you remove "deny himself," the whole thing tilts toward self-worship. Church becomes about my experience. Worship becomes about my feelings. Sermons become about my improvement. Service becomes about my recognition. Doctrine becomes about what fits my preferences. Fellowship becomes about who validates me. Even prayer becomes a tool for getting God to serve my will instead of yielding my will to God. But Jesus said, "deny himself." That command belongs at the front door of discipleship. It must be preached again, sung again, taught again, prayed again, and lived again.

Restoring this command will offend people. It offended people when Jesus preached it. The Lord never had trouble drawing crowds, but He also never softened truth to keep them. In John 6, when His sayings became hard, "many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John 6:66). The Lord did not chase them down with a softer message. He turned to the twelve and said, "Will ye also go away?" (John 6:67). That is not the method of modern church growth. Modern religion would have formed a committee to rebrand the message, revise the language, and find out why the crowd felt unsafe. Jesus let them walk. Truth mattered more than crowd retention. That alone should rebuke an age where churches are terrified to preach anything that might make self uncomfortable.

The forgotten command must be restored because Christ is worthy of followers, not consumers. A consumer asks, "What does this do for me?" A follower asks, "What would

thou have me to do?" A consumer judges the church by comfort, convenience, style, and emotional satisfaction. A follower judges his own heart by Scripture. A consumer wants blessing without burden. A follower takes up the cross daily. A consumer wants Jesus as helper. A follower receives Him as Lord. "And he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves" (2 Corinthians 5:15). There is the nail in the coffin of self-centered Christianity. Christ did not die so saved people could live unto themselves with better music. He died so they would live unto Him.

Conclusion

The command modern Christianity forgot is not complicated. "Let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). A child can understand the words, but the flesh spends a lifetime trying to escape them. Deny himself. Take up his cross. Follow Christ. That is discipleship. That is the path. That is the cure for the age of self-love. The world says love yourself. The religious world says discover yourself. The motivational pulpit says believe in yourself. The influencer says brand yourself. The therapeutic church says affirm yourself. The Lord Jesus Christ says deny yourself. That is the dividing line. A man can dress up self-love with Bible verses, but he cannot make it the doctrine of Christ.

This command does not produce self-hatred. It produces Christ-centered living. It does not call a believer to neglect responsibilities or despise legitimate blessings. It calls him to refuse the throne to the old man. It calls him to stop letting the flesh interpret truth, govern decisions, rule relationships, demand recognition, and rewrite Christianity around its appetites. The believer is not his own. "For ye are bought with a price" (1 Corinthians 6:20). That means ownership has changed. The blood of Jesus Christ did not purchase a man so he could go on living as the center of his own universe. It purchased him for God. The cross that saves the sinner also condemns the old life that once ruled him. Grace does not enthrone self. Grace teaches self to bow.

So let the soft age rage against it. Let the self-love preachers explain it away. Let the worship industry keep writing songs that stare into the mirror. Let the celebrity pastors keep building churches around their own faces. The words of Jesus Christ still stand, and heaven will not revise them for a generation drunk on its own reflection. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me." There is no deeper Christianity that bypasses that sentence. There is no higher spirituality that outgrows that command. There is no modern revelation that cancels it. The Christian life is not self on the throne with Jesus nearby. It is Christ on the throne and self on the cross. That is the command the church forgot, and that is the command that must be preached again.

3 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - The Throne Of Self

There is nothing new about self-worship. The modern world did not invent it, psychology did not discover it, social media did not create it, and the self-esteem preachers did not originate it. They simply gave an old sin new clothes, new language, new music, new lighting, and a new platform. The root of it goes back before a man ever put a crown on his head, before a celebrity ever posed for a camera, before a preacher ever turned a pulpit into a stage, and before a sinner ever said, "I have to live my truth." The root is found in the first rebel who looked at what God made him and decided that being a creature was not enough. "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning!" (Isaiah 14:12). There is the beginning of self exaltation. Lucifer did not begin by saying there was no God. He began by saying, in effect, that God should not be the only one on the throne.

That is why self-love is not harmless confidence. It is not just a personality imbalance. It is not merely a man needing a little encouragement. There is a kind of proper sobriety where a man understands what God has given him and uses it for the glory of God. Paul said, "not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly" (Romans 12:3). That is not the problem. The problem is when self gets drunk on itself. The problem is when the creature begins to act like the center. The problem is when a man's will, feelings, ambitions, wounds, reputation, image, dreams, and desires begin to carry more authority than the written word of God. At that point self has not merely asked for attention. Self has climbed into a throne. And when self gets on the throne, God's word becomes advisory, Christ becomes useful, the church becomes a platform, worship becomes emotional fuel, and life becomes one long campaign to protect the idol called me.

The throne of self is the hidden altar behind much of what passes for modern spirituality. A man can talk about God while serving self. A singer can sing about Jesus while feeding self. A preacher can hold a Bible while promoting self. A church can claim to exalt Christ while structurally revolving around self. That is what makes the sin so subtle and dangerous. The devil's first rebellion was not crude atheism. It was exalted religion without submission. It was beauty without humility, wisdom without obedience, position without gratitude, and ambition without fear. When Isaiah records Lucifer's words, we hear the heartbeat of every self-centered life: "I will ascend," "I will exalt," "I will sit," "I will ascend," "I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). That is the anatomy of self on the throne. My will. My way. My truth. My glory. My name. My feelings. My plan. My throne.

Chapter 1: Lucifer Did Not Begin As An Atheist

Lucifer's rebellion did not begin with the denial of God's existence. That is important. The first rebellion was not a philosophical debate in a college classroom. It was not a lost man

writing a book against the Bible. It was not a fool saying in his heart, “There is no God” (Psalm 14:1). Lucifer knew God existed. He was in the heavenly order. He had seen glory that men have never seen. He was not suffering from lack of evidence. His problem was not intellectual ignorance. His problem was pride. “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness” (Ezekiel 28:17). There is the inward rot. Beauty turned inward. Wisdom corrupted by self-admiration. Brightness becoming the occasion for pride instead of the reason for worship.

That is the pattern of self-worship. God gives a creature something, and the creature begins to worship the thing instead of the Giver. A man receives intelligence, and soon he thinks his mind is above Scripture. A woman receives beauty, and soon her mirror becomes her altar. A preacher receives gifts, and soon his ministry becomes a monument to himself. A singer receives a voice, and soon worship becomes performance. A businessman receives ability, and soon success becomes self-glory. A young person receives attention, and soon identity becomes an idol. The gift is not the problem. The heart is the problem. “What hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). That verse destroys boasting at the root. If a man has anything good, he received it. If he received it, he has no grounds to act as though he originated it.

Lucifer proves that proximity to glory does not guarantee humility. That should sober every Bible believer. A man can be close to holy things and still be ruined by pride. He can be around Scripture, preaching, music, ministry, doctrine, and Christian service and still secretly nurse a throne in his heart. Judas walked with Christ and loved money. Diotrophes was in a church setting and “loveth to have the preeminence” (3 John 9). The Pharisees handled the Scriptures and loved the praise of men. A person can be religious and self-enthroned at the same time. That is why atheism is not the only enemy. Sometimes the greater danger is a man who says he believes in God but keeps himself in the center of everything he touches.

Chapter 2: The Five Words Of Rebellion

Isaiah 14 gives us the language of self on the throne. “For thou hast said in thine heart, I will ascend into heaven” (Isaiah 14:13). Notice where it begins: “thou hast said in thine heart.” Rebellion is first incubated inwardly before it breaks outwardly. The heart starts talking before the mouth confesses it. That is true in Lucifer, and it is true in man. A sinner may still look religious on the outside while inside he is saying, “I will.” I will do what I want. I will define myself. I will choose my own way. I will not be corrected. I will not be told no. I will not submit to that verse. I will not forgive. I will not humble myself. I will not yield. Those words may never be spoken in public, but God hears what is said in the heart.

The repeated phrase “I will” is the music of hell’s first choir. It is the anthem of the self-enthroned creature. “I will ascend.” “I will exalt my throne.” “I will sit.” “I will ascend above the heights.” “I will be like the most High” (Isaiah 14:13-14). The issue is not merely ambition. Ambition submitted to God can become service. Paul said, “I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). There is godly labor without self-glory. The issue in Isaiah 14 is ambition against God. It is the will of the creature rising up against the will of the Creator. Lucifer was not content to serve in the place God assigned him. He wanted elevation. He wanted a throne. He wanted a seat. He wanted likeness to the most High without submission to the most High.

That spirit is everywhere today. It appears when a man says, “My will matters more than God’s word.” It appears when a woman says, “My feelings matter more than truth.” It appears when a preacher says, “My vision matters more than Scripture.” It appears when a church says, “Our growth matters more than doctrine.” It appears when a singer says, “My expression matters more than worshipping in spirit and in truth.” It appears when a Christian says, “My wounds give me the right to disobey.” It appears when a generation says, “My truth,” as though truth were private property instead of divine reality. Jesus Christ prayed, “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Lucifer said, “I will.” There are only two spirits there. One bows. One rises. One submits. One exalts itself. One gives the Father glory. One reaches for a throne.

Chapter 3: Self On The Throne Rewrites Authority

Once self climbs onto the throne, authority must be rewritten. That is why self-love always becomes a war against the word of God. A man cannot keep self enthroned and Scripture supreme at the same time. One of them must rule the other. If Scripture rules, self must bow. If self rules, Scripture must be edited, ignored, twisted, softened, reinterpreted, or treated as optional. This is why a self-centered generation can still be religious while rejecting plain Bible authority. They do not always throw the Bible away. Sometimes they keep it nearby and only use the parts that help the throne of self stay comfortable. They want promises without precepts, comfort without correction, grace without government, salvation without sanctification, and Jesus without lordship over their actual desires.

The Bible says, “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding” (Proverbs 3:5). Self on the throne says, “Trust your own understanding first, and use the Lord to bless it afterward.” The Bible says, “Be not wise in thine own eyes” (Proverbs 3:7). Self on the throne says, “Your perspective is sacred because it is yours.” The Bible says, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2). Self on the throne says, “If it feels right to me, it is right.” The Bible says,

“The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Self on the throne says, “Follow your heart.” Those two systems cannot be reconciled. One calls the heart deceitful. The other treats the heart as a prophet.

This is why the throne of self produces private interpretation in spirit, even when a person claims to honor the Bible. A man reads a verse and says, “That is not what it means to me.” A woman hears a command and says, “I do not feel convicted about that.” A preacher sees a doctrine and says, “That will not work with our audience.” A church sees a warning and says, “That sounds too negative.” A believer hears reproof and says, “That hurt my feelings, so it must not be from God.” But the Bible says, “for the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man” (2 Peter 1:21). If it did not come by the will of man, then it is not to be governed by the will of man. The throne of self always wants to pull the Bible down into the court of human feeling. But Scripture does not stand trial before the old man. The old man stands trial before Scripture.

Chapter 4: Self On The Throne Worships Its Own Image

When self is on the throne, image becomes everything. Lucifer’s heart was lifted up because of beauty. His wisdom was corrupted by brightness. “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty” (Ezekiel 28:17). The issue was not that beauty existed. God made beauty. The issue was that beauty became a mirror in which the creature admired himself. That same spirit controls much of the modern age. Image, presentation, appearance, platform, reputation, followers, reactions, photos, videos, staging, and public perception have become a kind of religious economy. People do not merely live. They perform their life before others. They do not merely have thoughts. They brand them. They do not merely serve. They record themselves serving. They do not merely worship. They turn worship into a visual experience.

This spirit has infected churches badly. The church was supposed to be the pillar and ground of the truth, not a theater for man’s image. “The church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Timothy 3:15). But when self takes the throne, truth gets pushed behind presentation. The stage matters more than the Scripture. The camera angle matters more than the conviction. The pastor’s look matters more than his doctrine. The worship atmosphere matters more than the words being sung. The emotional reaction matters more than whether the message is sound. The ministry becomes a brand, and the brand must be protected. At that point, a church can claim Christ as head while operating as though the image is lord.

The Bible’s answer is brutal to the flesh: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). Then it says He “made himself of no reputation” (Philippians 2:7).

No reputation. That phrase cuts like a sword through a reputation-crazed religious world. The Son of God did not come down here building an image for self. He humbled Himself. He took upon Him the form of a servant. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. The throne of self says, "Protect my reputation." The mind of Christ says, "no reputation." The throne of self says, "Make sure I am seen." The mind of Christ says, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). Any Christianity that cannot survive the loss of human applause was never centered on Christ to begin with.

Chapter 5: Self On The Throne Makes God A Servant

One of the most dangerous features of self-religion is that it does not always remove God from the vocabulary. It simply changes His role. God is still mentioned, but He is made to serve the dreams of self. Jesus is still sung about, but He is treated as the guarantor of personal success. The Holy Ghost is still referenced, but often as the one who validates inner impressions and private ambitions. Prayer is still practiced, but it becomes a way to enlist heaven in man's agenda rather than a way to yield man's will to God. That is a throne issue. When self sits at the center, God becomes useful only insofar as He supports what self wants.

This is upside-down Christianity. The Bible says, "Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power" (Revelation 4:11). It does not say man is worthy to receive endless affirmation from God. The Bible says, "The LORD hath made all things for himself" (Proverbs 16:4). It does not say the Lord made all things for the emotional fulfillment of the creature. The Bible says, "Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God" (1 Corinthians 10:31). It does not say do all to the glory of your dreams, your platform, your wounds, your identity, your destiny, or your personal story. When God is God, everything moves toward His glory. When self is god, God is expected to move toward self's glory.

This is why much modern religious language needs to be examined. It is not always what is said that exposes the error. It is what sits in the center. A preacher can say "God has a plan for your life," and that can be true if it means God's will, God's word, God's holiness, God's gospel, and God's glory. But when it means God exists to make your ambitions come true, the sentence has been hijacked by self. A song can say God loves me, and that can be true because "God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). But when the whole song turns God's love into a mirror for self-importance rather than a reason to worship the Saviour, the center has shifted. The question is not merely whether God is mentioned. The question is whether God is preeminent. "That in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

Chapter 6: Self On The Throne Cannot Receive Correction

A sure mark of self on the throne is the inability to receive correction. The self-enthroned man may claim to love truth, but he only loves truth that agrees with him. He may claim to respect Scripture, but only until Scripture crosses his will. He may claim to appreciate preaching, but only until the preaching hits the idol in his own chest. Then suddenly the preacher is mean, the doctrine is harsh, the church is unloving, the verse is being misused, and the rebuke is legalism. That reaction is not spiritual discernment. Often it is the old man screaming because the throne got touched.

The Bible says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Proverbs 27:6). Self on the throne wants kisses, not wounds. It wants affirmation, not correction. It wants cheerleaders, not watchmen. It wants soothing, not surgery. But the Bible says the word of God is “sharper than any twoedged sword” and is “a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). A sword cuts. A discerner exposes. If a man only wants a Bible that comforts him and never corrects him, he does not want the Bible. He wants a religious blanket. God’s book reproves, rebukes, exhorts, corrects, and instructs. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16).

The self-enthroned age calls correction hatred. But God’s love includes chastisement. “For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Hebrews 12:6). That one verse destroys the false love doctrine of the age. If chastening is hatred, then God hates His sons. But the Bible says the opposite. Chastening is proof of sonship and love. The throne of self wants a God who affirms everything and corrects nothing. The Bible reveals a Father who loves enough to chasten. A believer who cannot receive correction is not strong. He is brittle. He is not mature. He is childish. He is not spiritual. He is selfwilled. “Presumptuous are they, selfwilled” (2 Peter 2:10). That is what self on the throne becomes when challenged: presumptuous and selfwilled.

Chapter 7: The Cross Is God’s Answer To The Throne Of Self

God’s answer to the throne of self is not another throne for man. It is the cross. The devil said, “I will ascend.” The Son of God humbled Himself. The devil reached upward. Christ came downward. The devil sought a throne by exaltation. Christ received glory through humiliation and obedience. “And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). There is the complete opposite of Isaiah 14. Lucifer says, “I will.” Christ says, “not my will, but thine, be

done” (Luke 22:42). Lucifer reaches for the heights. Christ goes to Calvary. Lucifer wants to be like the most High. Christ, being in the form of God, takes the form of a servant.

That contrast exposes every self-centered version of Christianity as a lie. The Christian life is not Lucifer’s ambition baptized in Jesus’ name. It is not self climbing higher while quoting Bible verses. It is not my throne with Christian decorations. It is the life of Christ in a believer who has been crucified with Him. Paul said, “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). “Yet not I” is the death sentence on self-religion. Those three words ought to be written across the doors of modern churches, recording studios, conference halls, seminaries, and social media ministries. Yet not I. Not my glory. Not my brand. Not my will. Not my throne. Not my feelings as final authority. Christ liveth in me.

The cross does not negotiate with the throne of self. It replaces it. A believer is not called to polish self until it looks religious. He is called to reckon himself dead indeed unto sin and alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord. The Lord Jesus said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). There is the answer to Isaiah 14. Deny himself. Not exalt himself. Take up his cross. Not build his throne. Follow me. Not follow his heart. The old rebellion began with “I will.” The Christian life begins with “not my will.” Until that shift happens, a man may have religion, but self is still king. And wherever self is king, Christ is not being given the preeminence.

Conclusion

The throne of self is the oldest rebellion in the universe wearing modern clothes. It started with Lucifer saying, “I will,” and it continues every time a creature treats his own will as higher than the word of God. The details change, but the spirit is the same. My will. My way. My truth. My glory. My feelings. My image. My identity. My throne. The world celebrates it as authenticity. Modern religion often baptizes it as confidence, vision, destiny, or healing. But the Bible identifies it as pride, self-will, highmindedness, and rebellion. Paul said the perilous times would be marked by men being “lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2). That is not a side issue. That is the root system under the whole rotten tree.

Lucifer’s fall teaches us that a creature can be gifted, beautiful, elevated, intelligent, and religiously near holy things, and still be ruined by self-exaltation. That should terrify anyone with sense. It should terrify preachers, singers, teachers, writers, parents, church leaders, and every believer who handles spiritual things. The question is not merely whether a man believes in God. Lucifer believed in God’s existence. The question is whether God has the throne. Does Scripture rule the feelings? Does Christ get the glory? Does the cross govern ambition? Can correction be received? Can self be denied? Can reputation be lost? Can

the words “not my will, but thine, be done” be prayed honestly? If not, then the throne of self is still standing in the heart.

The answer is not to decorate that throne with Christian language. The answer is to tear it down by the word of God and the cross of Jesus Christ. Christ must have the preeminence. The old man must not be trusted. The flesh must not be enthroned. The heart must not be followed. The will must not be worshipped. The image must not be protected at the expense of truth. The believer must return to the words of the Saviour: “deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Lucifer said, “I will.” Jesus said, “not my will.” The world says, “exalt yourself.” The Bible says, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). There are only two roads. One builds the throne of self. The other bows before the throne of God.

4 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - The Gospel Of Self

The gospel of Jesus Christ is not a motivational speech for the old man. It is not a self-esteem program with Bible verses sprinkled over it. It is not God’s way of telling sinners how wonderful they were all along. The gospel Paul preached is not hard to locate, not hard to define, and not open to reinvention by every pulpit salesman who wants to turn Christianity into therapy for the flesh. Paul said, “Moreover, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand” (1 Corinthians 15:1). Then he tells you what it is: “how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures; And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3-4). There is the gospel. Christ died for our sins. Christ was buried. Christ rose again. The center is not man’s worth. The center is Christ’s work. The need is not man needing affirmation. The need is man having sins. The answer is not self-love. The answer is the death, burial, and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ.

That distinction matters because the gospel has been quietly replaced in many places by a different message. Not always openly. Not always with a printed doctrinal statement announcing, “We have rejected Paul’s gospel.” It happens by emphasis, by vocabulary, by omission, by mood, by what is constantly preached and what is never preached. The pulpit begins to sound less like a herald of divine truth and more like a life coach talking to wounded consumers. Sinners are told they are enough, they are worthy, they are amazing, they are powerful, they are destined for greatness, they are the head and not the tail, they are about to step into their season, and God is going to unlock their potential. But Paul did not say, “I delivered unto you first of all how valuable you are.” He said, “Christ died for our

sins.” The old gospel put Christ on the cross for guilty sinners. The new gospel puts self in the mirror and tells him how important he is.

This is where the series has to draw blood. If the devil cannot get rid of the gospel completely, he will redefine it until it becomes a religious mirror. That is what the gospel of self does. It keeps the word “Jesus,” but changes the meaning. Jesus becomes the one who improves your life, heals your self-image, validates your dreams, strengthens your identity, and makes your personal story shine. The cross becomes a symbol of how much you are worth rather than the place where sin was judged by a holy God. Grace becomes personal affirmation rather than undeserved mercy to the ungodly. Faith becomes believing in your destiny rather than trusting the finished work of Christ. Salvation becomes emotional uplift rather than deliverance from sin, death, hell, and judgment. When the gospel becomes a mirror instead of a cross, self has taken over the message. And Paul said, “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Galatians 1:8).

Chapter 1: Paul Declared A Gospel Not A Therapy Session

Paul said, “I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you” (1 Corinthians 15:1). That word “declare” matters. The gospel is an announcement, a proclamation, a message from God to man. It is not man’s emotional exploration of himself. It is not a religious conversation where the sinner gets to shape the message around his feelings. Paul did not sit down and ask Corinth what kind of gospel would make them feel valued. He declared what God had revealed. The gospel comes down from God. It does not bubble up out of human psychology. It is not crafted to flatter the audience. It is preached because God has spoken, Christ has died, the tomb is empty, and sinners need to be saved.

That is why the modern pulpit has become so weak in many places. It has forgotten the difference between declaration and discussion. A preacher can explain, plead, reason, comfort, and apply truth, but he is not free to redesign the message. He is a steward, not a manufacturer. Paul said, “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God” (1 Corinthians 4:1). A steward does not own the goods. He handles what belongs to another. The gospel belongs to God. The preacher has no right to remove the offense, soften the diagnosis, hide the blood, avoid sin, erase hell, or replace Christ’s finished work with human self-worth. If he does, he is not modernizing the gospel. He is corrupting it.

A therapy session may have its place when someone is dealing with wounds, confusion, or burdens, but therapy is not the gospel. Encouragement is not the gospel. Advice is not the gospel. Motivation is not the gospel. Emotional uplift is not the gospel. A man can leave a

church feeling better about himself and still be lost. A woman can cry during a song about how loved she is and still never trust Christ's blood for salvation. A teenager can hear that he has a destiny and still never understand that he is a sinner under condemnation without the Saviour. The gospel is not, "You are better than you think." The gospel is, "Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures." Until sin is dealt with and Christ's finished work is preached, whatever else is being said may be religious, touching, and popular, but it is not Paul's gospel.

Chapter 2: The Gospel Begins With Sin Not Self Worth

Paul says, "Christ died for our sins" (1 Corinthians 15:3). That one phrase destroys the gospel of self. It does not say Christ died because men failed to recognize their potential. It does not say Christ died because people needed to learn how valuable they were. It does not say Christ died because humanity was basically good but emotionally damaged. It says Christ died for our sins. Sin is the issue. Sin is the problem. Sin is what separates man from God. Sin is what brings death. "For the wages of sin is death" (Romans 6:23). Sin is what condemns the world. Sin is what required blood. Sin is why the Son of God went to Calvary.

The gospel of self hates that starting point because it wounds human pride. It wants to begin with man's pain, man's dreams, man's value, man's identity, man's trauma, man's story, and man's inner greatness. The Bible begins with man's guilt before God. "For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (Romans 3:23). That verse does not say all have suffered low self-esteem and fallen short of personal fulfillment. It says all have sinned and come short of the glory of God. The measurement is not man comparing himself with man. The measurement is God's glory. Against that standard, every mouth is stopped. "That every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God" (Romans 3:19). The gospel does not begin by opening man's mouth to boast in himself. It begins by shutting his mouth before God.

This is why preaching that never deals with sin cannot be called gospel preaching in any serious Bible sense. If there is no sin, there is no need for substitution. If there is no guilt, there is no need for justification. If there is no wrath, there is no need for propitiation. If there is no judgment, there is no need for deliverance. If there is no hell, there is no urgency. If man's real problem is merely that he does not love himself enough, then Calvary becomes excessive. But if man is guilty, helpless, dead in trespasses and sins, and under judgment, then the cross becomes the only hope. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). Notice the wording. Not while we were wonderful. Not while we were worthy. While we were yet sinners.

Chapter 3: Christ Died According To The Scriptures

Paul says Christ died “according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:3). That phrase anchors the gospel in divine revelation, not human emotion. The death of Christ was not an inspirational tragedy to help people feel seen. It was the fulfillment of God’s word. It was the Lamb of God bearing sin. It was substitution. It was blood atonement. It was the just dying for the unjust. “For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God” (1 Peter 3:18). That is the doctrine. Christ did not die to bring sinners to a better self-image. He died to bring them to God.

The modern gospel of self strips the cross of its doctrinal force and turns it into an emotional symbol. It says, “The cross proves how valuable you are.” Now there is a sense in which the love of God is displayed at Calvary, and no Bible believer denies that. “Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). But the cross primarily proves the holiness of God, the wickedness of sin, the justice of divine wrath, the necessity of blood, and the greatness of God’s grace. If the cross only becomes a mirror telling man how precious he is, the emphasis has shifted from God’s glory to man’s ego. The sinner does not stand at Calvary and say, “Look how important I must be.” He stands there and says, “Look what my sin required, and look what grace provided.”

“According to the scriptures” also means the gospel must be defined by the Bible, not by church culture. The Scriptures tell us what the death of Christ means. “The LORD hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isaiah 53:6). “He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities” (Isaiah 53:5). “Christ our passover is sacrificed for us” (1 Corinthians 5:7). “In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins” (Colossians 1:14). That is the language of the gospel: iniquity, transgression, sacrifice, redemption, blood, forgiveness. The gospel of self prefers language like purpose, destiny, value, healing, affirmation, breakthrough, and success. Some of those words may have legitimate uses in the right place, but they are not the apostolic definition of the gospel. If the vocabulary of the cross disappears, the doctrine of the gospel is already being replaced.

Chapter 4: He Was Buried And Rose Again

Paul says, “And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures” (1 Corinthians 15:4). The burial proves the reality of His death. The resurrection proves the victory of His person and work. Christianity does not rest on emotional uplift. It rests on a historical, bodily resurrection. If Christ is not risen, Paul says preaching is vain, faith is vain, believers are still in their sins, and we are of all men most miserable. “And if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17). Notice again the issue: sins. The resurrection is not merely God’s way of telling you to rise above

your negative thinking. It is God's declaration that the work of Christ is accepted and death has been conquered.

The gospel of self cannot handle that kind of objective truth for long because it wants Christianity to be mainly inward and emotional. It wants faith to mean I feel better, I believe in my purpose, I sense God's approval, I have found my identity, I am ready for my next season. But Paul grounds faith in something outside the believer: Christ died, was buried, and rose again. That is why salvation is secure when it is placed in Christ's finished work. If salvation rested on my feelings, I would be lost every other day. If salvation rested on my worthiness, I would never have been saved to begin with. If salvation rested on my ability to maintain the right emotional state, I would be in constant fear. But the gospel rests on Christ. He died. He was buried. He rose again. The believer stands in that gospel, not in his own mood.

The resurrection also means Christ is Lord, not a private therapeutic symbol to be used however the age desires. "God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ" (Acts 2:36). A risen Christ is not a servant of human self-worship. He is the Lord of glory. The gospel does not invite man to add Jesus to the throne of self as a helpful assistant. It announces that the crucified Saviour is risen, exalted, and worthy of faith, obedience, worship, and glory. The same Lord who saves sinners by grace also calls saved men to live unto Him. "And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves" (2 Corinthians 5:15). There it is again. The gospel does not end with self enthroned. Christ died and rose again so that they which live should not live unto themselves.

Chapter 5: Another Gospel Is Not A Small Error

Paul told the Galatians, "I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel" (Galatians 1:6). He did not treat gospel corruption as a minor emphasis problem. He did not say, "Well, they are just reaching a different generation." He did not say, "At least they are using the name of Jesus." He called it another gospel. Then he added, "Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ" (Galatians 1:7). That word "pervert" is strong. It means the gospel can be twisted. It can be distorted. It can be turned from its true form into something else, even while religious words remain.

In Galatia, the issue involved adding law works to the gospel of grace. In our age, one major corruption is replacing the gospel of grace with the gospel of self. The form differs, but the danger remains: Christ's finished work is no longer the center. In one case, man's works invade the gospel. In the other, man's worth invades the gospel. Both shift attention from

Christ to man. One says, "Christ plus my performance." The other says, "Christ plus my importance." Paul's gospel says Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again. The sinner receives salvation by faith, not by works, not by self-improvement, not by religious achievement, not by emotional affirmation, and not by discovering hidden greatness. "For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God" (Ephesians 2:8). Not of yourselves. That phrase should be nailed across the coffin of every man-centered gospel.

Paul's warning is severe because the gospel is sacred. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). Then he says it again in the next verse. "As we said before, so say I now again" (Galatians 1:9). Paul repeats himself because the matter is deadly serious. If an angel from heaven is not allowed to alter the gospel, then no celebrity pastor, worship leader, counselor, conference speaker, professor, influencer, or denominational committee has authority to do it either. The gospel is not clay in the hands of modern taste. It is a divine message delivered to the saints. Change the gospel, and you are not improving Christianity. You are attacking the very message by which sinners are saved.

Chapter 6: The Gospel Of Self Flatters The Old Man

The gospel of self is popular because it flatters the old man while pretending to honor Christ. It tells the sinner what he already wants to hear: you are special, you are misunderstood, you are powerful, you are the hero, you are worthy, you are enough, and God's job is to help you see it. That message does not offend the flesh. It feeds it. It does not bring a man to repentance. It brings him to self-acceptance. It does not make him say, "God be merciful to me a sinner" (Luke 18:13). It makes him say, "God, thank you for finally showing me my greatness." That is not the publican in the temple. That is the Pharisee with updated vocabulary.

The old man loves religious language when it can be used to avoid death. He will talk about destiny to avoid obedience. He will talk about healing to avoid repentance. He will talk about boundaries to avoid forgiveness. He will talk about calling to avoid humility. He will talk about grace to avoid holiness. He will talk about authenticity to avoid submission. He will talk about being misunderstood to avoid correction. The gospel of self gives him all the phrases he needs. It baptizes his excuses and calls them spiritual growth. But the Bible says, "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Ephesians 4:22). Put off the old man. Do not celebrate him. Do not brand him. Do not turn him into the star of the testimony.

This is why a man can sit under self-centered preaching for years and remain spiritually childish. He has been comforted but not corrected. Inspired but not instructed. Affirmed but not reproved. Entertained but not edified. He has been told over and over that God loves him, but he has not been taught to love God with obedience. He has been told that God has a plan for his life, but he has not been taught to submit his plans to the word of God. He has been told that he is valuable, but he has not been taught that he is bought with a price. “Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men” (1 Corinthians 7:23). The gospel of self produces consumers who want benefits. Paul’s gospel produces saints who know they were purchased by blood.

Chapter 7: The True Gospel Dethrones Self And Exalts Christ

The true gospel does not leave self on the throne. It dethrones self by revealing man’s helplessness and Christ’s sufficiency. The sinner does not save himself. He does not contribute righteousness. He does not wash away his own sins. He does not raise himself from spiritual death. He does not purchase redemption. He does not reconcile himself to God. Christ does the saving. Christ sheds the blood. Christ pays the price. Christ rises from the dead. Christ justifies the believer. Christ gets the glory. “Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Romans 3:24). Freely by His grace. Through the redemption in Christ Jesus. That leaves no room for self-glory.

The true gospel also produces a new direction of life. It does not teach a saved man to live unto himself with religious comfort added. Paul said Christ died “that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again” (2 Corinthians 5:15). That verse belongs in the center of this essay. Not henceforth live unto themselves. If the gospel being preached makes man more self-centered, more self-absorbed, more self-protective, more self-exalting, and more obsessed with his own importance, it is producing the opposite of 2 Corinthians 5:15. The death and resurrection of Christ do not authorize self-worship. They end it. The redeemed life is pointed toward Him who died and rose again.

This is the test. Does the message leave me admiring myself or worshipping Christ? Does it make sin look small or grace look great? Does it define my problem as low self-worth or guilt before God? Does it preach the blood, the cross, the burial, the resurrection, and the Scriptures, or does it use those words as background music for a sermon about my potential? Does it call me to faith in Christ or faith in myself? Does it produce humility or spiritual vanity? Does it lead to “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20), or does it lead to yet more of me with Jesus attached? The true gospel exalts Christ and humbles man. The gospel of self exalts man and uses Christ. One is apostolic. The other is counterfeit.

Conclusion

The gospel of self is one of the most dangerous counterfeits in the last-days church because it does not always sound openly wicked. It can sound warm, positive, encouraging, compassionate, and spiritual. It can use Bible words. It can mention Jesus. It can talk about grace, love, healing, and purpose. But if the center has shifted from Christ's finished work to man's emotional importance, the message has already been corrupted. Paul did not define the gospel as God's plan to reveal your greatness. He defined it as Christ dying for our sins, being buried, and rising again the third day according to the Scriptures. That gospel saves because it deals with sin, satisfies God's justice, magnifies God's grace, and rests entirely on the Lord Jesus Christ.

A guilty sinner does not need to be told he is enough. He needs to be told Christ is enough. He does not need a preacher to polish his self-image while his sins remain. He needs the blood of Jesus Christ. He does not need an altar call to discover his destiny. He needs to believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and be saved. He does not need a gospel that makes him the hero of the story. He needs the gospel where Christ is the Saviour, substitute, sacrifice, and risen Lord. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Redemption through His blood. Forgiveness of sins. Riches of His grace. That is Bible Christianity.

So let the age keep preaching its counterfeit if it must. Let the soft pulpits keep telling sinners how amazing they are. Let the stage lights glow over messages that never mention sin, blood, hell, judgment, repentance, substitution, or the resurrection as Paul preached it. The Bible believer has no permission to improve the gospel by making it man-centered. "But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you... let him be accursed" (Galatians 1:8). The gospel is not a mirror. It is a cross. It is not self affirmed. It is Christ crucified. It is not man discovered. It is man saved by grace through faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ. When the gospel becomes about self, it is no longer the gospel Paul preached. When Christ died for our sins, was buried, and rose again, God gave the world one saving message. Keep that message pure, and Christ gets the glory. Corrupt it with self, and the old serpent smiles.

5 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - Worship Turned Inward

The Lord Jesus Christ said, "But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him" (John 4:23). That verse settles the whole issue before the arguments even begin. God is not

looking for noise without truth. He is not looking for emotion without doctrine. He is not looking for performance without holiness. He is not looking for a religious experience where man stares into the mirror and calls it worship. He is seeking true worshippers, and those worshippers must worship “in spirit and in truth.” The next verse says, “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). Notice the word “must.” That is not a suggestion. That is not a preference. That is not a style debate. That is a divine requirement. Worship must be spiritual, and worship must be true.

That means worship can be corrupted even when it is emotional, beautiful, popular, moving, polished, and religious. A song can make people cry and still be shallow. A service can stir the room and still not exalt God properly. A congregation can sing the name of Jesus repeatedly and still spend most of the song circling around how the worshipper feels, how valuable the worshipper is, how seen the worshipper is, how special the worshipper is, and how important the worshipper is. That is where the danger lies. The issue is not simply old songs versus new songs. Some old songs are doctrinally thin, and some newer songs contain truth. The issue is not merely instruments versus no instruments, a piano versus a guitar, a hymnbook versus a screen, or a choir versus a worship team. The deeper issue is direction. Is the worship rising toward God in spirit and in truth, or is it turning inward until the singer becomes the subject?

This is one of the most subtle ways the last-days religion of self enters the church. Paul said, “For men shall be lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2), and that love of self does not stay out in the street. It walks into the sanctuary, grabs a microphone, and learns the language of devotion. It sings about God in a way that keeps self emotionally enthroned. It talks about grace in a way that flatters the old man. It speaks of love in a way that makes man the center instead of God. It creates church experiences where the main test is not whether the truth was sung, but whether the worshipper felt moved, affirmed, lifted, soothed, validated, or personally seen. That is not worship in spirit and in truth. That is spiritualized self-absorption. When worship becomes a mirror instead of an altar, self has climbed into the holy place.

Chapter 1: True Worship Begins With God Not Man

The Lord said, “the true worshippers shall worship the Father” (John 4:23). That sounds simple, but it is exactly where modern worship often goes wrong. True worship begins with God as the object. It does not begin with man’s mood, man’s need, man’s emotion, man’s wounds, man’s worth, man’s story, or man’s desire to feel spiritually stirred. Worship is not first about how I feel in the presence of God. It is about the worthiness of God Himself. “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name; worship the LORD in the beauty of

holiness” (Psalm 29:2). Glory is due unto His name. That is the starting point. God does not become worthy because I feel something. He is worthy whether I feel anything or not.

That is why much worship must be judged by more than atmosphere. The room can be dim, the lights can be arranged, the chord progression can swell, the singer can tremble, the crowd can raise hands, and yet the whole thing can be dangerously man-centered if the words never rise above self. True worship is not created by manipulating human emotion. It is produced when truth about God grips the spirit of a believer and turns him Godward. David said, “I will praise thee, O LORD, with my whole heart; I will shew forth all thy marvellous works” (Psalm 9:1). Notice the direction. The Lord is addressed. His works are declared. His name is praised. The worshipper is engaged, but the worshipper is not the object.

Modern self-love religion has trained people to evaluate worship backward. They ask, “Did I enjoy it? Did I feel something? Did it speak to me? Did it meet me where I am? Did it make me feel loved?” Those questions reveal the throne. The better question is, “Was God glorified? Was truth sung? Was Christ exalted? Was Scripture honored? Was the flesh humbled? Was holiness preserved? Was the gospel clear? Did the song teach people to worship God or to stare at themselves?” A church can condition people to think they have worshipped because they had a strong emotional experience. But an emotional experience is not necessarily worship. A football stadium can stir emotion. A concert can stir emotion. A patriotic rally can stir emotion. Worship requires truth, reverence, and the right object.

Chapter 2: In Spirit And In Truth

The Lord did not say true worshippers would worship in spirit only. He said “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). That balance matters. Worship must not be dead formality, where men mouth correct words with no heart, no reverence, no awe, no gratitude, no love, and no spiritual reality. But worship must also not be wild emotion severed from doctrine. Spirit without truth becomes religious excitement. Truth without spirit becomes cold formalism. God requires both. The spirit must be engaged, but the spirit must be governed by truth. The heart must be moved, but the heart must be moved by what God has revealed, not by emotional manipulation.

This is why Bible worship has substance. It tells the truth about God. It tells the truth about man. It tells the truth about sin. It tells the truth about the cross. It tells the truth about the blood. It tells the truth about grace. It tells the truth about holiness. It tells the truth about heaven, judgment, redemption, the resurrection, the word of God, and the coming of the Lord. “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). If worship is to be in truth, then the word of God must govern the content. The phrases may be poetic, but the doctrine must be sound. The

melody may be beautiful, but the message must be biblical. The voices may be skillful, but the words must not lie about God, flatter man, or replace the cross with sentiment.

The self-centered worship culture often wants spirit without truth. It wants the feeling of surrender without actual obedience. It wants the mood of reverence without the fear of God. It wants the language of love without the doctrine of holiness. It wants to talk about God's nearness while avoiding God's authority. It wants to sing about being held while saying little about being bought. It wants the warmth of belonging without the sharpness of reproof. But the Bible says, "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16). Singing is supposed to teach and admonish. If the songs never teach doctrine and never admonish the heart, then they are not functioning the way Scripture describes.

Chapter 3: The Cross Has Been Replaced By The Mirror

There was a time when much of the church's singing kept the cross central. It sang of the blood of Jesus Christ, the old rugged cross, the Lamb of God, the wounds of the Saviour, the mercy of God, the guilt of man, redemption purchased, grace bestowed, and sinners washed. Those themes did not flatter the flesh. They humbled it. They made a man remember that he was not saved because he was amazing, but because Christ was merciful. "In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:14). That is worship material. Blood. Redemption. Forgiveness. Christ. A saved man should never outgrow singing about those things.

But much modern worship has drifted from the cross to the mirror. The song may still mention Jesus, but the emotional center is often the worshipper. I am loved. I am chosen. I am seen. I am enough. I am held. I am called. I am wanted. I am important. Now, there are biblical truths about being loved, chosen, accepted in the beloved, and cared for by God. A believer should rejoice in those truths. But when the overwhelming direction of worship becomes self-awareness instead of God-admiration, something has gone wrong. The cross becomes a tool to make me feel special instead of the place where my sins were judged and my Saviour bled. The old songs often made the believer say, "Jesus paid it all." The new self-centered spirit often makes him say, "Look how loved I am."

That is a dangerous shift because the mirror can use Christian words. It does not always sound wicked. It can sound tender, intimate, and encouraging. But the question is still direction. Is the song leading me to glory in Christ, or is it leading me to glory in how Christ feels about me? Is it teaching me to worship God, or is it teaching me to use God's love as an emotional mirror for self-importance? Paul said, "God forbid that I should glory, save in

the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ” (Galatians 6:14). The cross is where boasting dies. If a worship culture uses the cross to produce more self-fascination, it has missed the point. The blood of Jesus Christ does not exist to inflate the ego of the old man. It cleanses sinners and glorifies the Lamb.

Chapter 4: Worship Music Teaches Doctrine

People often treat worship music as though it is only emotional background, but singing teaches. That is why the Bible connects song with instruction. “Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19). Colossians says singing should involve “teaching and admonishing one another” (Colossians 3:16). That means a church’s songs are part of its doctrinal diet. People remember what they sing. Children remember what they sing. New believers remember what they sing. Weak believers absorb what they sing. A shallow song repeated fifty times may shape a congregation more than one strong sermon they barely remember. That is why the words matter.

If a church sings mostly about feelings, it will produce feeling-centered Christians. If it sings mostly about personal worth, it will produce self-conscious Christians. If it sings mostly vague romantic phrases to God with little doctrine, it will produce shallow Christians who confuse emotional intensity with spiritual depth. If it sings strong truth about the blood, the cross, the resurrection, the holiness of God, the word of God, the second coming, surrender, prayer, grace, judgment, and obedience, it will help form people who think biblically. Songs are not neutral. They either train the mind in truth or train the emotions in fog. “For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33). A foggy song may feel deep, but depth without clarity is not Bible spirituality.

This is why churches must stop excusing weak music by saying, “But people like it.” People like all kinds of things that are not good for them. The issue is not whether a song is catchy. The issue is whether it is true. The issue is not whether it makes people cry. The issue is whether it teaches truth. The issue is not whether the band can play it well. The issue is whether the words are worthy of the God being addressed. “Sing unto him a new song; play skilfully with a loud noise” (Psalm 33:3). Skill is not condemned. New songs are not condemned. But skill and newness do not excuse doctrinal emptiness. A polished song can still be spiritual junk food. A beautiful melody can still carry man-centered theology. If worship is to be in truth, the truth must be tested.

Chapter 5: The Worshipper Is Not The Subject

The worshipper participates in worship, but he is not the subject of worship. That distinction must be recovered. When the church gathers, the purpose is not to rehearse the

emotional biography of the singer. The purpose is to praise the Lord. “Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power” (Psalm 150:1). The Psalms are filled with personal language, but even when David speaks personally, the direction is Godward. “I will love thee, O LORD, my strength” (Psalm 18:1). “The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want” (Psalm 23:1). “Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name” (Psalm 103:1). David’s soul is involved, but God is the object.

Modern worship often reverses that. God is mentioned, but the worshipper’s emotional state becomes the subject. The congregation sings less about who God is and more about how God makes them feel. Less about the objective work of Christ and more about the inward experience of being loved. Less about holiness and more about comfort. Less about surrender and more about reassurance. This trains Christians to approach worship as consumers of spiritual emotion. They come to be filled, moved, soothed, validated, and lifted. Again, God does comfort His people. “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people, saith your God” (Isaiah 40:1). But comfort is not the same as self-enthronement. Biblical comfort points the heart back to God, His promises, His truth, and His glory. Self-centered comfort keeps the heart circling itself.

The worshipper is not supposed to disappear as though he has no heart, no tears, no gratitude, and no testimony. But he must not become the center. The moon reflects the sun. It does not replace it. The believer reflects the grace of God. He does not become the object of worship. John the Baptist had the right order when he said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). That verse belongs in the sanctuary. It belongs in the choir room. It belongs behind the pulpit. It belongs in the heart of every singer, musician, worship leader, preacher, and saint. If the worshipper increases and Christ decreases, the direction is wrong. If the song makes self larger and Christ smaller, the song has failed no matter how many hands went up.

Chapter 6: Performance Can Masquerade As Worship

Another danger is performance masquerading as worship. Performance is not automatically wrong in the sense that public singing requires preparation, skill, order, and presentation. The Bible does not praise sloppiness. The singers in the Old Testament were appointed, trained, and organized. But the danger comes when the human performer becomes the focus. The voice becomes the attraction. The stage presence becomes the draw. The lighting becomes the mood maker. The personality becomes the center. The congregation becomes an audience. The music becomes a product. The worship leader becomes a religious entertainer. At that point, the name of God may still be sung, but the machinery is feeding man.

The Lord warned about religious acts done to be seen of men. “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them” (Matthew 6:1). He said the hypocrites prayed “that they may be seen of men” (Matthew 6:5). He said they disfigured their faces when fasting “that they may appear unto men to fast” (Matthew 6:16). The principle applies. The flesh can turn anything holy into a stage. It can turn giving into a performance, prayer into a performance, fasting into a performance, preaching into a performance, and singing into a performance. The issue is not whether people can see you. Public ministry means people see you. The issue is whether being seen is secretly the point.

That is why worship leaders and singers need fear. Not stage fright. Fear of God. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). A person handling worship should tremble at the possibility of drawing hearts to himself instead of God. A preacher should fear becoming the attraction. A singer should fear becoming the emotional center. A musician should fear loving the excellence of the sound more than the glory of the Lord. A church should fear building a service that moves people without grounding them in truth. The flesh loves applause, and religious applause is still applause. Jesus said of the hypocrites, “They have their reward” (Matthew 6:2). If the reward sought is attention, then attention may be all that is received.

Chapter 7: Restoring God Centered Worship

God-centered worship must be restored by putting truth back in the center. That means the songs must be judged by Scripture, not merely taste. A church should ask whether the words are doctrinally sound, whether they exalt Christ, whether they honor the cross, whether they contain biblical substance, whether they teach and admonish, whether they promote holiness, whether they humble the flesh, and whether they fit worship “in spirit and in truth.” A song does not need to contain every doctrine in the Bible, but it should not be empty, misleading, sentimental, or man-centered. The church is not obligated to sing every popular song just because it is popular. Popularity is not authority. The word of God is authority.

God-centered worship must also recover reverence. The Bible says, “God is greatly to be feared in the assembly of the saints, and to be had in reverence of all them that are about him” (Psalm 89:7). Reverence does not mean deadness. It does not mean joyless formality. It means God is treated as God. The sanctuary is not a nightclub. The pulpit is not a comedy stage. The worship service is not a concert where the crowd rates the experience. God is holy. “Exalt ye the LORD our God, and worship at his footstool; for he is holy” (Psalm 99:5). Holiness belongs in worship. Awe belongs in worship. Gravity belongs in worship. Joy belongs there too, but joy must be holy joy, not fleshly excitement painted with religious words.

God-centered worship must finally restore the right aim: “singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord” (Ephesians 5:19). To the Lord. That phrase is the cure. Not to the crowd. Not to the performer. Not to the emotional needs of self. Not to the brand of the church. Not to the online audience. To the Lord. If the singer remembers that, it will change how he sings. If the church remembers that, it will change what it chooses. If the preacher remembers that, it will change how he oversees the service. If the believer remembers that, it will change how he evaluates worship. The question becomes simple: did this go to the Lord, or did it return to me? True worship rises. Self-centered worship curves inward.

Conclusion

Worship turned inward is one of the clearest signs that the religion of self has entered the church. It does not always look rebellious. It can look tender, moving, beautiful, and spiritual. But the direction exposes it. If worship constantly circles back to man, his feelings, his worth, his experience, his identity, his wounds, and his emotional state, then self has become the hidden subject. The Lord Jesus Christ said true worshippers must worship the Father “in spirit and in truth” (John 4:23-24). That means worship is not whatever moves us. It is what honors God according to truth. It is not enough for a song to mention Jesus. It must exalt Him rightly.

The church does not need worship that flatters the old man. It needs worship that glorifies the Lord. It needs songs full of Scripture, doctrine, reverence, gratitude, holiness, surrender, the blood, the cross, redemption, resurrection, and hope. It needs music that teaches and admonishes, not merely music that creates atmosphere. It needs singers who fear God more than they crave attention. It needs preachers and pastors who care more about truth than production. It needs believers who stop judging worship by how it made them feel and start judging it by whether God was honored. “Give unto the LORD the glory due unto his name” (Psalm 29:2). That is the issue. Glory is due unto Him.

The last-days crowd is full of “lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2), and when lovers of self design worship, worship becomes a mirror. But Bible worship is not a mirror. It is an altar. It is a throne room. It is a redeemed people bowing before a holy God because the Lamb is worthy. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Revelation 5:12). Not worthy is the worshipper. Not worthy is the performer. Not worthy is the pastor. Not worthy is the platform. Worthy is the Lamb. When that truth gets restored, worship stops turning inward and starts rising upward again. Christ gets the glory, the flesh loses its throne, and the church remembers why it sings.

6 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - The Self Centered Church

The Bible says of the Lord Jesus Christ, “And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; **that in all things he might have the preeminence**” (Colossians 1:18). That verse does not leave much room for religious showmanship. It does not say Christ should have a place. It does not say Christ should be mentioned. It does not say Christ should be used as the theme of the branding. It says He is the head of the body, the church, and that in all things He might have the preeminence. Preeminence means first place, highest place, governing place, chief place, supreme place. Christ is not supposed to be a decorative name attached to a ministry that revolves around man. He is not supposed to be the religious vocabulary that makes a human empire sound spiritual. He is not supposed to be the slogan on the wall while the whole operation is designed around a personality, a stage, a brand, a platform, a movement, a celebrity pastor, or a manufactured experience. He is the head.

This is where the self-centered church must be exposed. The self-centered church does not always deny Jesus Christ openly. In fact, it may talk about Him constantly. It may sing His name, put His name on the screen, print His name on merchandise, and mention Him in every service. But the question is not whether Christ is mentioned. The question is whether Christ is preeminent. A man can use Christ’s name while building his own name. A church can claim to serve Christ while functioning as a ministry machine centered around human charisma. A congregation can say “amen” to the Bible while practically admiring the messenger more than obeying the message. A worship service can be emotionally powerful while training people to crave atmosphere more than truth. A pastor can say he is just a servant while every structure in the ministry points back to his image, his voice, his vision, his presence, his brand, and his control. That is not Christ having the preeminence. That is man using Christ as the banner over his own throne.

The last-days religion of self does not stay with individuals. It builds institutions. Paul said, “For men shall be lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2), and when lovers of self build churches, they build self-centered churches. They may build them with Bibles, music, outreach programs, media teams, leadership books, social campaigns, and emotional testimonies, but the underlying spirit is the same. The church becomes a mirror instead of a body under the Head. It becomes a platform instead of a pillar and ground of the truth. It becomes a brand instead of a flock. It becomes a stage instead of a place where the word of God is preached with power, doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness. The cure is not merely to make the church smaller, quieter, older-fashioned, or less polished. The cure is to restore the preeminence of Jesus Christ. A small church can still be man-centered. A traditional church can still be personality-driven. A plain church

can still worship its own preacher. The issue is not size or style first. The issue is headship. Is Christ truly the Head, or is His name being used while man runs the show?

Chapter 1: Christ Is The Head Of The Church

Paul says, “And he is the head of the body, the church” (Colossians 1:18). That means the church is not a democracy of flesh, not a business franchise, not a preacher’s private kingdom, not a religious entertainment company, and not a platform for gifted personalities to display themselves. It is a body, and Christ is the Head. A body does not function properly when the hand decides it is the head. A body is deformed when one member starts acting like the whole thing exists for him. The church belongs to the Lord Jesus Christ because He purchased it with His own blood. Paul told the elders at Ephesus “to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood” (Acts 20:28). That one phrase should humble every preacher alive. The church is blood-bought property. It is not a man’s stage.

When Christ is Head, His word rules. That is where many churches fail. They may say Christ is Head, but the real authority becomes surveys, trends, money, attendance, donor pressure, denominational machinery, pastoral preference, cultural sensitivity, emotional reactions, and the fear of losing people. The Bible is opened, but the Bible does not govern. Verses are quoted, but doctrine is avoided if it disrupts the machine. Preaching is adjusted to protect the brand. Correction is softened to keep the crowd. Holiness is reduced to general inspiration. Separation is treated like an embarrassment. Sin is renamed brokenness. Repentance is replaced with healing. Judgment is pushed out of sight. The Head has spoken in Scripture, but the body is being trained to ignore the nerves if they cause discomfort.

Christ as Head also means no man is indispensable. God uses men, and He gives pastors, teachers, evangelists, and ministers for the edifying of the body. But no man is the head. Paul asked the Corinthians, “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” (1 Corinthians 1:13). That verse should be read every time people begin building personality cults around preachers. Paul would not let Corinth make him the center, and Paul was an apostle. He did not die for them. He did not purchase them. He did not rise again for their justification. If Paul would not take the place of Christ, what makes some modern preacher think he can structure a whole ministry around his own personality and call it spiritual leadership? Christ is the Head. Everyone else is a servant.

Chapter 2: Preeminence Is More Than Mention

Colossians 1:18 says, “that in all things he might have the preeminence.” Preeminence is not satisfied by occasional mention. A church can mention Jesus and still not give Him first place. Politicians mention God. Award winners mention God. Musicians mention God. Lost people mention God when it suits them. Mention is cheap. Preeminence is costly. If Christ has the preeminence, then His word corrects the church, His gospel defines the mission, His glory governs the worship, His holiness shapes the people, His cross humbles the flesh, and His authority outranks every human preference. If Christ merely gets mentioned, then men can keep their thrones as long as they attach His name to the program.

This is one of the great deceptions of modern church culture. People assume that because Jesus is named, Jesus is central. That is not necessarily true. The Bible warns of people who draw near with their mouth while the heart is far away. “This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me” (Matthew 15:8). Lip honor is not preeminence. Religious vocabulary is not preeminence. Emotional singing is not preeminence. Saying “all glory to God” after building a monument to self is not preeminence. The real test is what governs the structure. Who gets protected? Who gets promoted? What gets compromised? What cannot be questioned? Where does the attention go? What happens when Scripture threatens the system?

If Christ has the preeminence, then the church must be willing to lose anything that competes with Him. Lose the crowd if the crowd will not endure sound doctrine. Lose the applause if the applause requires compromise. Lose the money if the money demands silence. Lose the image if the image must be protected by hiding truth. Lose the program if the program replaces prayer and preaching. Lose the celebrity status if celebrity weakens humility. The church does not exist to preserve itself at the expense of Christ’s authority. Jesus said, “I will build my church” (Matthew 16:18). He did not ask men to build their brands and borrow His name for credibility. The question is not whether a ministry can survive without a certain personality. The question is whether that ministry is submitted to Christ as Head.

Chapter 3: The Pastor Is A Shepherd Not A Celebrity

The Bible calls pastors shepherds, not celebrities. Peter wrote, “Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof” (1 Peter 5:2). He did not say, “Build a fan base.” He did not say, “Develop your platform.” He did not say, “Turn the sheep into an audience.” He said, “Feed the flock of God.” The flock is God’s flock. The oversight is stewardship, not ownership. A pastor is under the chief Shepherd. Peter says, “And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that fadeth not away” (1 Peter 5:4). The pastor is not the chief Shepherd. He is an undershepherd who will answer to the real Shepherd.

That ought to put fear in any man who stands behind a pulpit. A pastor is not called to make himself the face, focus, and functional head of the church. He is called to feed, protect, guide, rebuke, exhort, and care for the flock according to the word of God. Paul told Timothy, "Preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2). He did not say, "Preach yourself." He did not say, "Preach your brand." He did not say, "Preach your leadership philosophy." He did not say, "Preach your emotional journey until the congregation becomes dependent on your personality." The pulpit is not a mirror for the preacher. It is a place where the word of God is to be opened and delivered with authority.

Celebrity Christianity is poisonous because it trains people to admire the messenger more than obey the message. The preacher becomes the attraction. His voice, stories, style, humor, mannerisms, clothing, image, and reputation become part of the church's identity. People say, "I go to so-and-so's church," as though the church were a man's possession. They quote the pastor more than Scripture. They defend the pastor faster than doctrine. They notice when the pastor is absent more than when Christ is absent from the sermon. That is not healthy church life. That is religious personality culture. Paul said, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5). That verse should end the celebrity pastor model.

Chapter 4: The Stage Can Replace The Sanctuary

A church building is not holy because of wood, carpet, lights, or architecture. God does not dwell in temples made with hands the way He did in Old Testament shadows. But the gathering of the saints should still be treated with reverence because the church belongs to God and the ministry of the word is serious. The danger in many places is that the sanctuary has been replaced by the stage. The congregation has been turned into an audience, the service into a production, the preacher into a performer, the singers into entertainers, and worship into an experience. The issue is not whether a church has lights or instruments or screens. The issue is whether the whole atmosphere trains people to watch man or worship God.

When the stage replaces the sanctuary, truth often becomes secondary to impact. The question becomes, "Did it move the room?" instead of "Was it true?" The sermon is judged by delivery more than doctrine. The music is judged by atmosphere more than content. The service is judged by energy more than holiness. The crowd is judged by response more than repentance. The church begins to function like a religious theater, and theater demands performance. Performance demands applause. Applause feeds self. And before long, the ministry claims Christ but runs on the fuel of human attention. That is exactly what the flesh wants.

The Bible says, “Let all things be done decently and in order” (1 Corinthians 14:40). Order is good. Excellence is not evil. Sloppiness is not spirituality. But polish without reverence is dangerous. Skill without truth is dangerous. Beauty without holiness is dangerous. A choir can sing beautifully and still glorify flesh. A band can play skillfully and still create a man-centered emotional storm. A preacher can speak powerfully and still preach himself. The question is not whether something is done well. The question is whether Christ is exalted, Scripture is honored, and the flesh is denied. If the stage becomes a machine for exciting self rather than a place where truth is ministered unto the Lord, the church is self-centered even if the production is impressive.

Chapter 5: The Congregation Can Become Consumers

A self-centered church often produces self-centered members. If the church trains people to think like consumers, they will eventually judge everything by personal satisfaction. They will ask, “Did I like the music? Did the sermon fit my mood? Did the service make me feel good? Did the church meet my needs? Did the people validate me? Did I enjoy the atmosphere?” Those questions are not always wrong in every sense, but when they become central, the congregation has shifted from body life to consumer religion. The church is not a restaurant where saints come to rate the service. It is a body where members are to serve, grow, submit to truth, edify one another, and glorify God.

Paul wrote, “Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular” (1 Corinthians 12:27). Members of a body do not exist as independent consumers. They are joined. They function together. They bear burdens. They care for one another. They do not gather merely to extract an experience. They gather as a body under the Head. “And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it” (1 Corinthians 12:26). That is body life. It is very different from modern church shopping, where every congregation is measured by how well it serves personal preference. The body language of the New Testament rebukes the consumer spirit of the age.

Consumer Christianity also hates correction because correction does not feel like customer service. A consumer expects the product to fit his desires. A disciple expects the word to correct his desires. That is why many self-centered churches avoid serious preaching. They know consumers may leave if confronted. But Paul did not tell Timothy to entertain consumers. He said, “reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). Reproof and rebuke are part of healthy ministry. A church that cannot reprove its people because it fears losing them is not shepherding a flock. It is managing a customer base. The self-centered church must keep the consumer satisfied. The Christ-centered church must keep the word of God faithful.

Chapter 6: Ministry Machines Can Hide Spiritual Emptiness

A church can be busy and still be spiritually empty. That is a hard truth, but it is true. Programs, events, outreach campaigns, conferences, small groups, media teams, podcasts, classes, volunteer systems, giving campaigns, and building projects can create the appearance of life. But activity is not the same as spiritual health. A machine can move without being alive. A ministry machine can produce motion, noise, content, and statistics while the church itself is drifting from Christ's preeminence. The question is not merely how much is happening. The question is whether what is happening is governed by the word of God and centered on Jesus Christ.

The church at Laodicea is a terrifying picture of religious self-satisfaction. They said, "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing" (Revelation 3:17). That sounds like a successful church by modern standards. Wealth, increase, self-confidence, no sense of need. But the Lord said they were "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked" (Revelation 3:17). The church's self-assessment and Christ's assessment were opposite. That should make every church tremble. A ministry can look successful to men and be nauseating to Christ. The numbers can rise while discernment falls. The budget can grow while holiness shrinks. The brand can expand while the presence of Christ is treated as optional.

This is why the machinery must be judged. Does the program serve Christ, or does Christ's name serve the program? Does the outreach preach the gospel clearly, or does it merely promote the church? Does the media point to truth, or does it feed the image? Does the leadership structure protect doctrine, or does it protect personalities? Does the giving support ministry, or does it feed empire-building? Does the busyness produce holiness, prayer, Bible knowledge, soul-winning, charity, humility, and obedience, or does it simply keep people occupied? Martha was "careful and troubled about many things" (Luke 10:41), but Mary sat at Jesus' feet and heard His word. Activity can become a distraction from Christ. A self-centered church loves machinery because machinery can keep the crowd moving while Christ is no longer truly central.

Chapter 7: The Cure Is The Preeminence Of Christ

The cure for the self-centered church is not merely a different style of service. It is not solved by replacing modern songs with old songs, screens with hymnbooks, stages with pulpits, large buildings with small ones, or casual clothes with suits. Some of those things may matter in particular contexts, but none of them automatically gives Christ preeminence. A man can sing hymns and worship himself. A preacher can wear a suit and preach himself. A small church can be centered around one man's ego. A traditional

church can be as dead and self-protective as any modern entertainment church. The cure is deeper. Christ must be restored to first place in everything.

Christ's preeminence means the word of God rules the church. Not trends. Not feelings. Not fear. Not money. Not personalities. Not denominational loyalty. Not the pastor's preferences. Not the crowd's appetite. The Bible must govern the preaching, the worship, the leadership, the correction, the fellowship, the mission, and the doctrine. "Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth" (John 17:17). A Christ-preeminent church will preach the word even when it cuts. It will sing truth even when it is not popular. It will correct sin even when people dislike it. It will exalt the cross even when the flesh wants entertainment. It will teach doctrine even when the crowd wants motivation. It will point to Christ even when man wants the spotlight.

Christ's preeminence also means every servant must be willing to decrease. John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30). That is the spirit missing in much of modern ministry. He must increase. Not the pastor. Not the brand. Not the singer. Not the movement. Not the denomination. Not the online following. Christ must increase. The self-centered church says, "Look what we are building." The Christ-centered church says, "Look at the Lamb." The self-centered church protects its image. The Christ-centered church protects the truth. The self-centered church produces admirers of men. The Christ-centered church produces followers of Jesus Christ. The issue is simple: either Christ has the preeminence, or self has found a way to use His name.

Conclusion

The self-centered church is one of the most dangerous forms of the last-days religion of self because it can look spiritual while being fundamentally man-centered. It can have preaching, singing, giving, outreach, programs, buildings, cameras, testimonies, and crowds. It can say the name of Jesus often. It can speak about grace, love, purpose, community, and worship. But if the structure revolves around man, if the attention flows toward personalities, if the people admire the messenger more than obey the message, if the service is designed to produce emotional experience more than truth, and if Christ is mentioned but not obeyed as Head, then the church is self-centered. It may be impressive, but it is not healthy.

The Bible gives no permission for Christ to be reduced to a ministry slogan. He is "the head of the body, the church" (Colossians 1:18). He purchased the church with His own blood. He gives gifts to the church. He walks among the churches. He judges the churches. He builds His church. He is the chief Shepherd. He is the foundation, the Lord, the Saviour, the Bridegroom, and the coming King. No pastor, singer, personality, program, board,

denomination, or movement has the right to take His place. A church that forgets this may still function as an organization, but it has forgotten its Head. A body without proper connection to the Head may still twitch with activity, but it is not healthy life.

So the answer is not to trade one form of man-centered religion for another. The answer is to restore Christ to His rightful place. Let the pulpit preach Christ. Let the songs exalt Christ. Let the programs serve Christ. Let the pastor point to Christ. Let the congregation obey Christ. Let the church's identity be found in Christ, not in a man, a brand, a style, or a machine. "That in all things he might have the preeminence" is not a decorative phrase for a church website. It is the divine order of the church of the living God. When Christ is preeminent, self loses its throne, men become servants again, the word of God regains authority, and the church remembers that it does not exist to make man famous. It exists for the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ.

7 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - Lovers Of Praise

The Bible says, "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (John 12:43). That verse ought to make every religious man nervous. It was not spoken about tavern keepers, brothel owners, drunkards, thieves, or open blasphemers. It was spoken in the context of rulers who believed on Christ but would not confess Him because they were afraid of losing their standing among men. "Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him; but because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue" (John 12:42). Then comes the diagnosis: "For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." There it is. They had enough light to know Christ was true, but not enough love for God to bear the reproach of confessing Him. They wanted the approval of heaven, but they wanted the applause of earth more. That is a deadly place to stand.

The love of praise is one of the most respectable sins in religious circles because it can hide behind good works, Bible language, ministry activity, public service, and doctrinal correctness. A man can preach truth and still be eaten alive with the hunger to be admired. A woman can sing spiritual songs and still be starving for attention. A teacher can post Bible studies and still be checking the response more than praying over the fruit. A church can say "to God be the glory" while its whole structure is designed to draw attention to a personality. A preacher can condemn worldliness while being drunk on the sound of his own name. That is why this sin is so dangerous. It does not always look like rebellion. Sometimes it wears a suit, carries a King James Bible, shouts amen, sings in the choir,

posts Scripture, and smiles humbly while secretly craving to be seen, quoted, followed, praised, defended, and admired.

We live in an age that has mechanized praise. The old hunger for applause has been wired into phones, cameras, platforms, likes, reposts, views, subscribers, comments, clips, reels, thumbnails, stages, conferences, podcasts, and religious branding. The flesh always wanted praise, but now it can measure it by the minute. It can watch the numbers climb. It can compare responses. It can learn what gets attention and then reshape ministry around applause. That is where a man must tremble. Using a platform to point people to Christ is one thing. Using Christ to build a platform for self is another. The difference may be invisible to the crowd, but it is not invisible to God. “The LORD pondereth the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2). He knows whether a man is trying to make Christ known or trying to make himself known with Christ as the subject matter. He knows whether the praise of God is enough or whether the heart secretly feeds on the praise of men.

Chapter 1: The Rulers Believed But Would Not Confess

John 12 gives one of the most frightening pictures of religious cowardice in the Bible. “Nevertheless among the chief rulers also many believed on him” (John 12:42). That is a remarkable statement. These were not ignorant men in the street. These were rulers. They had seen and heard enough to believe on Christ. But the verse does not stop there. “But because of the Pharisees they did not confess him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue.” They believed, but they would not confess. They had conviction, but not courage. They had light, but not boldness. They had inward persuasion, but they were not willing to pay the social price of public identification with the rejected Christ.

That is still the problem. There are people who know more truth than they will confess because confession would cost them praise. They know the Bible is right, but they also know what their circle will think. They know the doctrine is true, but they do not want to be mocked by the educated crowd. They know modern Christianity is compromised, but they do not want to lose invitations, friendships, followers, or respect. They know Christ deserves open allegiance, but they are afraid of being put out of their synagogue, whatever their synagogue happens to be. It may be a denomination. It may be a social circle. It may be an academic environment. It may be a ministry network. It may be family approval. It may be an online audience. The synagogue changes, but the fear remains.

The Holy Ghost explains the issue with painful clarity: “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God” (John 12:43). That is not a small weakness. That is misplaced love. They loved the wrong praise more. They preferred human approval over divine approval. That means the real altar in their heart was not truth. It was reputation. They did

not want the reproach of Christ. But the New Testament says, “Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach” (Hebrews 13:13). Christianity does not promise the applause of men. It calls a believer to bear the reproach of the rejected Saviour. If a man cannot stand losing human praise, he will eventually compromise the confession of Christ.

Chapter 2: Praise Addiction Is A Religious Drug

The praise of men can become a drug. Once the flesh tastes it, it wants more. A compliment becomes a meal. A reaction becomes fuel. A crowd becomes intoxication. A repost becomes validation. A platform becomes identity. And before long, a person is no longer serving because Christ is worthy. He is serving because attention has become necessary to his emotional survival. That is spiritual bondage. The Bible says, “The fear of man bringeth a snare” (Proverbs 29:25). The love of man’s praise brings a snare too. A man who needs praise is easy to control. Just threaten his applause, and he will start adjusting the message.

This is why the love of praise is so destructive in ministry. It does not always make a man stop preaching immediately. It makes him edit. He begins to notice what gets the most approval. He learns which subjects stir the crowd and which subjects make them uncomfortable. He notices which posts get shared and which truths get ignored. He notices what donors like, what followers cheer, what critics attack, what friends prefer, and what influential men reward. Then, slowly, the knife comes out. Not against the flesh, but against the message. He trims a little here, softens a little there, avoids a doctrine, removes a rebuke, changes a phrase, drops a warning, lowers the temperature, and calls it wisdom. But underneath it is fear of losing praise.

Paul was the opposite of that spirit. He said, “For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men?” Then he answered it: “for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10). That verse is a bomb under the stage of religious celebrity. If pleasing men becomes the controlling aim, the servant of Christ has been compromised. A preacher should care about souls. He should not be needlessly cruel. He should speak the truth in charity. But he cannot make the praise of men the compass. The compass is the word of God. The aim is the glory of God. The servant is bound to Christ, not applause. The moment applause becomes the master, the preacher becomes a slave.

Chapter 3: Platforms Reveal Motives

A platform is not automatically wicked. Paul used public places. He reasoned in synagogues, marketplaces, schools, houses, and before rulers. The issue is not whether truth is spoken publicly. Truth should be proclaimed. The Lord said, “Go ye into all the

world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). Public ministry is not the problem. The problem is when the platform becomes the point. The problem is when visibility becomes more desirable than faithfulness. The problem is when a man uses the name of Christ to gather attention to himself rather than using whatever attention he has to point men to Christ.

That difference can be subtle. Two men may preach the same verse. One trembles because God’s word is holy and souls need truth. The other enjoys the sound of being important. Two people may post the same Bible quote. One wants Christ magnified. The other wants to be seen as deep. Two singers may sing the same hymn. One wants the Lord worshipped. The other wants admiration for the voice. Two pastors may lead churches. One wants the flock fed. The other wants the people dependent on his personality. Men cannot always see the difference from the outside. But God can. “For the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

This is why a platform must be kept under the cross. The cross says, “yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). The flesh says, “Look at me.” The cross says, “Look at Christ.” The flesh says, “Build my name.” The cross says, “Hallowed be thy name.” The flesh says, “Defend my image.” The cross says, “made himself of no reputation” (Philippians 2:7). If the platform makes self larger, the cross is being avoided. If the platform makes Christ larger, the platform can be used lawfully. But every man with a microphone, page, pulpit, channel, classroom, podcast, or public ministry had better keep asking the hard question: am I using attention for Christ, or am I using Christ for attention?

Chapter 4: Religious Praise Can Be More Dangerous Than Worldly Praise

Worldly praise is obvious. A man wants to be admired for money, beauty, power, talent, intellect, success, influence, or style. That is old-fashioned vanity. But religious praise is more dangerous because it can disguise itself as spirituality. A man wants to be admired for his doctrine. A singer wants to be admired for her worship. A teacher wants to be admired for insight. A preacher wants to be admired for boldness. A helper wants to be admired for sacrifice. A giver wants to be admired for generosity. A sufferer wants to be admired for endurance. A debater wants to be admired for sharp answers. Flesh does not care what costume it wears as long as it gets applause.

The Lord exposed this in Matthew 6. He warned about doing alms “to be seen of them” (Matthew 6:1). He warned about hypocrites sounding a trumpet when they gave, “that they may have glory of men” (Matthew 6:2). He warned about praying in public “that they may be seen of men” (Matthew 6:5). He warned about fasting in a way that appeared unto men,

“that they may appear unto men to fast” (Matthew 6:16). Those are religious actions. Giving, praying, and fasting are not worldly activities. Yet the flesh turned them into performances. That is the danger. The old man can use holy things for unholy praise. He can turn devotion into display.

Jesus said of such men, “They have their reward” (Matthew 6:2). That is one of the most chilling statements in the Bible. If a man does religious work to be seen of men, and men see him, he got what he wanted. That may be all he gets. The likes, applause, admiration, invitations, compliments, and reputation may be the reward in full. Imagine spending years doing religious things and finding out that heaven marks much of it as already paid in human praise. That ought to sober every saint. It is better to be unknown and approved by God than famous and spiritually bankrupt. It is better to have God’s praise in secret than man’s applause in public.

Chapter 5: The Praise Of Men Silences Confession

The love of praise does not merely puff men up. It shuts their mouths. John 12 shows this clearly. They believed, but “they did not confess him” (John 12:42). Why? Because confession would cost them standing. The praise of men does not always tempt a man to say false things first. Sometimes it tempts him to say nothing. Silence can be a form of compromise when truth requires speech. A man may not deny Christ with his lips, but he may refuse to identify with Him openly because he loves approval too much. He may not preach error, but he may avoid preaching truth that would cost him.

This is especially relevant in an age where everyone is managing perception. People want enough Christianity to look spiritual to believers but not enough to be despised by the world. Enough Bible to maintain credibility but not enough sharpness to offend. Enough conviction to sound serious but not enough separation to lose friends. Enough boldness to impress the choir but not enough to stand alone. That is the spirit of John 12. They believed, but they would not confess. They had private belief without public cost. But the Bible says, “For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation” (Romans 10:10). Confession matters because truth is not meant to be locked away in cowardice.

Paul was not ashamed. He said, “For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ” (Romans 1:16). That is the opposite spirit. The gospel brought reproach, but Paul confessed it. The cross offended, but Paul gloried in it. Christ was rejected, but Paul preached Him. “But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness” (1 Corinthians 1:23). Paul knew exactly how different crowds would react. One would stumble. One would call it foolish. He preached Christ anyway. That is the test. Can a man

speak truth when one crowd stumbles and another mocks? Or does he need the praise of men so badly that he learns to say only what keeps them clapping?

Chapter 6: The Praise Of God Is Enough

The only cure for loving the praise of men is learning that the praise of God is enough. John 12:43 says they loved the praise of men “more than the praise of God.” That means the issue is comparative love. It is not that human encouragement is always evil. A kind word from a brother can strengthen the heart. Paul thanked God for faithful saints. The Bible says, “A word spoken in due season, how good is it!” (Proverbs 15:23). Encouragement is not the enemy. The enemy is when human praise becomes more important than divine approval. The enemy is when a man cannot be faithful unless men notice. The enemy is when God’s approval is not enough unless it is confirmed by public admiration.

The Lord Jesus lived before the Father. He said, “I seek not mine own glory” (John 8:50). He said, “I honour my Father” (John 8:49). He said, “I do always those things that please him” (John 8:29). There is the standard. The Son of God did not live for the applause of the crowd. He was praised one day and crucified another. Men cried “Hosanna” and then “Crucify him.” That is human praise. It is unstable, shallow, emotional, and often worthless. If a man lives on it, he will be tossed around like a leaf in a storm. But if he lives to please God, he can stand when the crowd turns.

Paul lived that way too. He said, “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment” (1 Corinthians 4:3). That is not arrogance. That is freedom. Paul was not saying he could never be corrected. He was saying man’s judgment was not his final court. Then he said, “he that judgeth me is the Lord” (1 Corinthians 4:4). A man who lives before the Lord can survive being misunderstood, slandered, ignored, criticized, and forgotten by men. He can also survive being praised without becoming drunk on it. The praise of God must become enough. If it is not enough, a man will eventually sell truth for applause.

Chapter 7: To God Be The Glory Must Be More Than A Phrase

“To God be the glory” is a good phrase when it is true. But it can also become a religious cover for self-promotion. A man can say “to God be the glory” after carefully arranging everything so men will admire him. A singer can say it after a performance built around her voice. A preacher can say it while loving every compliment. A ministry can say it while branding itself around a personality. The phrase is not magic. God is not fooled by religious captions. “Be not deceived; God is not mocked” (Galatians 6:7). He knows whether the glory is truly being directed to Him or whether the phrase is being used to make self-promotion sound humble.

Real glory to God means self is willing to be forgotten. John the Baptist said, “He must increase, but I must decrease” (John 3:30). That is not a slogan for a conference banner. That is a death sentence to religious ego. He must increase. I must decrease. The flesh hates both sides of that sentence. It does not mind Christ increasing a little, as long as self increases too. It does not mind saying Christ is wonderful, as long as people also notice how wonderful the speaker is for saying it. But John said Christ must increase and I must decrease. That is the opposite of praise addiction. That is a man who knows the Bridegroom gets the bride, and the friend of the Bridegroom rejoices to hear His voice.

If the church is going to escape the love of praise, it must recover the fear of God, the cross of Christ, and the judgment seat. Paul wrote, “For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ” (2 Corinthians 5:10). That day will burn through motives. It will not be impressed with numbers, platforms, followers, applause, invitations, stage lights, or public admiration. “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” (1 Corinthians 4:5). Then, the verse says, “then shall every man have praise of God.” That is the praise worth having. Not empty applause now, but approval then.

Conclusion

The love of praise is one of the most dangerous diseases in religious life because it can grow in the soil of good activity. It can attach itself to preaching, singing, writing, giving, serving, debating, teaching, posting, leading, and sacrificing. A man does not have to be worldly-looking to be praise-addicted. He can be orthodox, conservative, separated, articulate, and publicly bold while secretly needing admiration like an addict needs a needle. That is why John 12:43 is so searching: “For they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God.” The danger is not merely receiving praise. The danger is loving it more. The danger is needing it. The danger is adjusting truth to keep it.

The age has made this sin easier than ever. Platforms have turned praise into numbers. Followers have turned attention into identity. Likes and reposts have made applause measurable. Religious celebrity culture has taught people to confuse visibility with fruit. But God is not fooled by visibility. He weighs the heart. He knows whether the platform is being used for Christ or Christ is being used for the platform. He knows whether a preacher wants souls helped or his name magnified. He knows whether a singer wants God worshipped or her voice admired. He knows whether a teacher wants truth obeyed or his insight praised. He knows whether “to God be the glory” is a confession or a costume.

The cure is not to hide from all public service. The cure is to put public service under the cross. Preach, but preach Christ. Sing, but sing to the Lord. Write, but write for truth. Post,

but point men to Scripture. Lead, but remain a servant. Use the platform, but do not worship it. Receive encouragement with thanksgiving, but do not live on it. Let the praise of God be enough. If men applaud, keep walking. If men mock, keep walking. If men ignore you, keep walking. If men misunderstand you, keep walking. The Lord Jesus Christ is worth more than the praise of men. And when the final accounting comes, one word from Him will outweigh a lifetime of applause from a world full of self-loving sinners.

8 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - Boasters And Proud

Paul does not leave “lovers of their own selves” standing alone. The moment the Holy Ghost gives that diagnosis, He shows what grows out of it: “For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud” (2 Timothy 3:2). That order matters. Self-love has offspring. When a man loves himself in the place where God belongs, he becomes covetous because self always wants more. He becomes a boaster because self must advertise itself. He becomes proud because self must exalt itself. That is not psychology. That is Bible. The last-days man is not merely confused, wounded, misunderstood, or lacking affirmation. He is in love with himself, and that love produces a mouth that brags and a heart that swells. The world may dress it up as confidence, authenticity, leadership, personal branding, self-expression, or boldness, but the King James Bible calls it what it is: “boasters, proud.”

Pride is not a harmless personality flaw. It is not just an irritating habit. It is not merely the reason some people talk too much about themselves. Pride is the swelling of the old man against God. It is the creature inflating himself in the face of the Creator. It is dust acting like deity. It is a sinner forgetting he is a sinner, a servant forgetting he is a servant, and a redeemed man forgetting he was purchased by blood. “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). That verse is not a proverb for motivational posters. It is a warning label on the coffin of every proud man who ever thought he could strut past God. Pride does not merely make a man unpleasant. Pride puts a man on a collision course with divine resistance. “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble” (James 4:6). If God resists a man, that man has a bigger problem than hurt feelings.

The frightening thing is that boasting and pride can wear many costumes. Some people boast loudly. They boast about money, knowledge, success, influence, talent, beauty, ministry, sacrifice, boldness, doctrine, experience, or how much they have suffered. Others boast subtly. They use false humility, constant self-reference, victim language, emotional

manipulation, spiritualized insecurity, or a carefully crafted image of being misunderstood. The old man can brag while shouting, and he can brag while whispering. He can brag while saying, “I am the greatest,” and he can brag while saying, “Nobody understands how hard it is to be me.” Flesh does not care which road it takes as long as self stays in the middle of the conversation. The boaster wants to be noticed. The proud man wants to be elevated. The Bible believer must learn to recognize both, because pride is not always loud enough to be obvious. Sometimes it hides behind tears, testimonies, ministry, doctrine, and the phrase, “I am just trying to help.”

Chapter 1: Self Love Learns To Talk

Self-love has a vocabulary. The lover of self cannot remain silent for long because self wants expression, recognition, and reinforcement. That is why “lovers of their own selves” are immediately connected with “boasters” (2 Timothy 3:2). The mouth reveals the throne. Jesus said, “for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh” (Matthew 12:34). If the heart is full of self, the mouth will eventually speak self. It may speak self through open arrogance, constant personal stories, subtle comparisons, humble-sounding exaggerations, spiritual name-dropping, or the need to insert personal importance into every conversation. But it will come out. The mouth cannot hide the heart forever.

A boaster does not simply possess facts about himself. He needs those facts to be seen by others. There is a difference between giving an honest testimony and using testimony as a mirror. There is a difference between acknowledging God’s grace in your life and advertising your own importance under the cloak of gratitude. Paul could say, “by the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10), but he immediately gave the credit to grace: “yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.” That is the difference. The proud man says “by the grace of God” because it sounds humble, but the spotlight still lands on him. Paul says it and then drags the spotlight back to God.

The tongue of the boaster does not always sound like raw arrogance. Sometimes it sounds like comparison. “I would never do what they did.” “I know more than most people.” “Nobody works like I work.” “Nobody sees what I see.” “Nobody has suffered like I have suffered.” “Nobody is as faithful as I am.” “Nobody understands my calling.” That is not discernment. That is self-love talking. The Bible warns, “Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips” (Proverbs 27:2). A man does not have to constantly decorate himself with words. If God wants something known, God can make it known. If a man must keep announcing his greatness, he probably knows deep down that the throne he is sitting on is made out of cardboard.

Chapter 2: Pride Swells The Old Man Against God

Pride is more than self-confidence gone too far. It is the swelling of the old man against God. The proud man may not consciously say, “I am against God,” but pride places him there. James says plainly, “God resisteth the proud” (James 4:6). That is war language. The proud man has God set against him. He may have friends, followers, admirers, money, ministry, education, talent, and a room full of applause, but if God resists him, he is finished. A man can survive human opposition. He cannot survive divine resistance. No talent can overcome it. No platform can outrun it. No charm can soften it. No religious vocabulary can hide from it.

Pride is the old Luciferian disease. The creature gets lifted up because of what he has been given and begins to act as though the gift originated in himself. Ezekiel says, “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness” (Ezekiel 28:17). That is the anatomy of pride. A good thing is received, then admired, then internalized as self-glory, and then corrupted. Beauty becomes vanity. Intelligence becomes conceit. Knowledge becomes arrogance. Ministry becomes self-importance. Boldness becomes cruelty. Separation becomes superiority. Giftedness becomes entitlement. Even doctrine can become a platform for pride if a man forgets that truth was given to him by grace and not manufactured by his flesh.

That is why Paul warned against being “puffed up” (1 Corinthians 4:6). That phrase is perfect. Pride inflates a man. It makes him larger in his own mind than he is in reality. A balloon can look big, but it is mostly air. That is pride. It swells without weight. It takes up space without substance. It makes noise when punctured. The Bible says, “Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth” (1 Corinthians 8:1). Knowledge is good when governed by charity and submission to God, but knowledge in the hands of pride becomes inflation. A man can know Bible facts and still be swollen with flesh. He can win arguments and lose humility. He can expose error and become error in spirit. Pride is not defeated merely by knowing more. Pride is defeated by bowing lower.

Chapter 3: Loud Boasting Is Easy To Spot

Loud boasting is the kind most people recognize. It is the man who has to tell everyone how much he knows, how much he owns, how much he has done, how many people follow him, how many enemies he has defeated, how hard he works, how important his voice is, and how uniquely gifted he is. This kind of boasting is crude, but it is common. The world rewards it. Social media amplifies it. Modern leadership culture often teaches it under softer names like confidence, personal branding, platform building, and influence. But the Bible still calls it boasting. “Boast not thyself of to morrow; for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth” (Proverbs 27:1). A man bragging about tomorrow does not even control his next breath.

Loud boasting is foolish because it forgets dependence. James rebukes the man who says he will go into a city, continue there a year, buy and sell, and get gain. Then James says, “Whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow” (James 4:14). He continues, “For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that” (James 4:15). Then comes the warning: “But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil” (James 4:16). That is plain. Boasting that forgets God’s will is evil. Not merely unwise. Evil. The proud man talks as if life belongs to him, time belongs to him, opportunity belongs to him, success belongs to him, and strength belongs to him. James says he does not even know what tomorrow will bring.

The boaster also forgets accountability. He speaks as though he will never stand before God. But “every one of us shall give account of himself to God” (Romans 14:12). That verse should quiet a man’s mouth. The boaster loves an audience now, but he forgets the final audience then. He loves to be praised by men, but he forgets that God will weigh motives. He loves to explain himself, exalt himself, and defend himself, but he forgets that “the Lord pondereth the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2). Loud boasting may impress people who worship confidence, but it does not impress God. The Lord can bring a loud man low in one day. Nebuchadnezzar boasted over Babylon, and before the lesson was finished he was eating grass like an ox. God knows how to puncture a balloon.

Chapter 4: Subtle Boasting Is Harder To Detect

Subtle boasting is often more dangerous because it can sound humble. A person can boast through false modesty, always making sure people know how much they have done while pretending not to want attention. They can say, “I do not want to talk about myself,” and then talk about themselves for fifteen minutes. They can say, “I am nothing,” while carefully guiding the conversation toward how much they have sacrificed. They can act embarrassed by praise while making sure the praise continues. That is flesh with a mask on. The old man does not mind wearing humility if humility gets him attention.

Victimhood can also become a form of boasting. Not every wounded person is proud, and real suffering should be handled with compassion. But the flesh can turn suffering into superiority. “Nobody has been hurt like me.” “Nobody understands what I went through.” “Nobody is as strong as I am for surviving this.” “Nobody has a right to correct me because of what I endured.” At that point suffering has become a throne. The person may not be boasting of achievement, but he is boasting of pain. His wounds have become credentials. His hurt has become authority. His emotional history has become a shield against truth. But even real wounds do not give the flesh permission to rule. The Lord Jesus was wounded more than any man, and He still said, “not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42).

Spiritual boasting is especially ugly. A man boasts about prayer, fasting, holiness, Bible knowledge, separation, soul-winning, discernment, persecution, or how much truth he sees that others miss. The Pharisee in Luke 18 did exactly that. He prayed “with himself” and said, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are” (Luke 18:11). Then he listed his sins he did not commit and his religious acts he did perform. That man was not in a bar. He was in the temple. He was not cursing. He was praying. But his prayer was self-advertisement. Meanwhile the publican said, “God be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13). Jesus said that man went down to his house justified rather than the other. Spiritual boasting may sound devout, but God knows when a prayer is just pride talking to itself in religious language.

Chapter 5: Pride Resists Correction

One of the clearest signs of pride is the inability to receive correction. A proud man may claim to love truth, but he only loves truth when he can use it against someone else. When truth turns and points at him, he suddenly becomes a victim. The preacher is too harsh. The brother is judgmental. The verse is being misapplied. The rebuke was not loving enough. The timing was wrong. The tone was wrong. The motive was wrong. Anything will do as long as self escapes the knife. But the Bible says, “Reprove not a scorner, lest he hate thee: rebuke a wise man, and he will love thee” (Proverbs 9:8). Correction reveals whether a man is a scorner or wise.

Pride hates correction because correction means self is not the final authority. That is intolerable to the proud heart. It wants to be praised, not examined. It wants to be validated, not reproof. It wants to be understood, not judged. But God’s word does not come asking the old man’s permission. “All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness” (2 Timothy 3:16). Reproof and correction are not abuses of Scripture. They are part of Scripture’s God-ordained purpose. A church or believer that only wants comfort and never correction does not want the whole Bible. He wants selected verses arranged around his ego.

The proud man’s resistance to correction also reveals that he fears shame more than sin. He is not mainly grieved that he was wrong. He is grieved that someone saw it. That is pride. Humility says, “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Psalm 139:23). Pride says, “Do not expose me.” Humility says, “Let the righteous smite me; it shall be a kindness” (Psalm 141:5). Pride says, “How dare you touch me?” Humility bows under the faithful wound. Pride resists because it must protect the image. But an image is a poor substitute for a clean heart. Better to be corrected and grow than admired and rot.

Chapter 6: God Resists The Proud

James 4:6 says, “God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.” Peter says the same: “God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Peter 5:5). When God repeats a thing, a man had better listen. God resists the proud. That means pride does not merely create social problems. It creates a spiritual opposition from God Himself. A proud man may feel successful for a season. He may gather applause. He may gain followers. He may build influence. He may seem untouched. But the resistance of God is not always immediate lightning. Sometimes it is God letting the proud man rise high enough that the fall is public.

“Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18). Pride walks ahead carrying the banner, and destruction follows behind. The proud man thinks he is ascending, but he is actually approaching a cliff. Haman rose high before the gallows. Nebuchadnezzar boasted before his humiliation. Pharaoh hardened himself before the Red Sea closed. Herod received praise as a god before worms ate him. God has no difficulty dealing with proud flesh. He can use a stone, a worm, a donkey, a rooster, a fever, a storm, or a small circumstance to bring a man down. Flesh is fragile even when it struts.

The frightening part is that religious pride often assumes it is protected because it is religious. But God resisted proud religious men all through the Bible. The Pharisees were not spared because they were religious. Uzziah was not spared when his heart was lifted up to his destruction and he intruded into the priest’s office. Diotrephes was not praised for loving preeminence in a church setting. God does not give pride a pass because it carries a Bible. In fact, pride around holy things may be worse because it takes what belongs to God and uses it to exalt man. The more truth a man handles, the more carefully he should walk. “Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall” (1 Corinthians 10:12).

Chapter 7: The Cure Is Humbling Yourself Under God

The cure for boasting and pride is not pretending to be worthless so people will call you humble. That is just pride wearing sackcloth. The cure is real humility before God. James says, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). Peter says, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6). Notice the action. “Humble yourselves.” A man should not wait for God to humiliate him. He should humble himself. There is a difference. If a man will go down willingly before God, he does not need to be knocked down publicly by God.

Humility begins by remembering what you are without grace. Paul asked, “For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive?” (1 Corinthians 4:7). That verse is a hammer to pride. What do you have that you did not receive? Your life,

breath, mind, strength, opportunity, Bible, salvation, gifts, knowledge, family, ministry, endurance, and fruit are received. If you received it, why boast as though you produced it? The proud man acts like a thief bragging over stolen goods. He takes what God gave and uses it to praise himself. Humility looks at the same blessings and says, "Not unto us, O LORD, not unto us, but unto thy name give glory" (Psalm 115:1).

Humility also glories in the right thing. Paul said, "But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord" (2 Corinthians 10:17). That is not a call to never rejoice in what God has done. It is a command to place the glory where it belongs. The Christian does not need to advertise self because Christ is enough. He does not need to be the subject because Christ is preeminent. He does not need to be praised because grace is sufficient. He does not need to boast in himself because he can glory in the cross. "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Galatians 6:14). The cross kills boasting because it tells the truth about man and the truth about God. Man was so sinful Christ had to die. God was so gracious Christ did die. Where is boasting then? It is excluded.

Conclusion

"Boasters" and "proud" belong exactly where Paul placed them, right after "lovers of their own selves" (2 Timothy 3:2). Self-love talks, and then self-love swells. It must advertise itself. It must defend itself. It must be recognized, admired, validated, praised, pitied, quoted, followed, or treated as special. Sometimes it is loud and obvious. Sometimes it is quiet and religious. Sometimes it brags through achievements. Sometimes it brags through wounds. Sometimes it brags through doctrine. Sometimes it brags through false humility. But the root is the same: self is too large, and God is too small in the heart.

The Bible does not treat pride lightly. "Pride goeth before destruction" (Proverbs 16:18). "God resisteth the proud" (James 4:6). Those two verses ought to scare the swagger out of any man with sense. If destruction follows pride and God resists pride, then pride is not a minor flaw. It is a spiritual emergency. A proud man may be gifted, intelligent, articulate, successful, attractive, religious, doctrinally informed, and publicly admired, but he is still in danger. God can bring him down. God can expose him. God can resist him. God can let the very thing he boasted in become the instrument of his humiliation.

The answer is the cross and the humility of Christ. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). He made Himself of no reputation. He humbled Himself. He became obedient unto death. The proud man wants a reputation. Christ made Himself of none. The boaster wants to be exalted. Christ humbled Himself. The lover of self wants applause. Christ obeyed the Father. That is the pattern. The Christian life is not self swelling under religious language. It is self humbled under the mighty hand of God. Let the world

boast. Let the last-days crowd advertise itself. Let the self-love prophets keep preaching their mirror gospel. The Bible believer has one safe place to glory: “in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

9 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - Selfwilled

The King James Bible uses a word that cuts straight through the modern worship of independence, authenticity, self-expression, and personal autonomy. That word is **“selfwilled.”** Paul says of a bishop, “For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre” (Titus 1:7). Peter uses the same word when he describes a corrupt crowd that despises government: “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities” (2 Peter 2:10). That word is not soft. It is not flattering. It does not describe a strong leader, an independent thinker, a bold personality, or a misunderstood visionary. It describes a person whose own will has become the ruling authority. Self-love has hardened. The emotions have calcified. The ego has been reinforced. The person is no longer simply weak or wounded. He is governed by himself.

That is where self-love becomes especially dangerous. In the earlier stages, self-love may sound like emotional language. I need to love myself. I need to protect myself. I need to find myself. I need to express myself. I need to honor my feelings. I need to be true to myself. But when that spirit matures, it becomes self-will. Now the person cannot be corrected. He cannot be governed. He cannot be pastored. He cannot be rebuked. He cannot be reasoned with from Scripture unless Scripture agrees with what he already wanted. He will call his stubbornness conviction, his rebellion discernment, his pride strength, his isolation spiritual maturity, and his refusal to listen “being led by God.” But the Bible calls it selfwilled. A selfwilled man may look strong, but he is really a slave to the most unreliable master he could ever serve: his own flesh.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the complete opposite of the selfwilled spirit. In Gethsemane, with the cup before Him and Calvary ahead of Him, He prayed, “Father, if thou be willing, remove this cup from me: nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). There is the cure for every selfwilled heart. “Not my will.” That phrase is the death blow to the religion of self. Lucifer said, “I will” in Isaiah 14. The selfwilled man says, “I will.” The modern age says, “My will, my truth, my body, my choice, my dreams, my way, my identity, my boundaries, my life.” But the Son of God said, “not my will, but thine, be done.” The

highest example of spiritual strength in the universe was not self-assertion. It was submission to the Father. That means the selfwilled man is not strong because he insists on his own way. He is weak, because he cannot bow.

Chapter 1: The Word Selfwilled Exposes The Root

The word “selfwilled” is one of those KJV words that needs no improvement. Modern language can talk around it all day, but the old Book pins it to the wall. Selfwilled means the will of self is in command. It is not merely having preferences. It is not simply making decisions. It is not being firm where firmness is required. It is the inward condition where a man’s own will becomes so dominant that every other authority is forced to bow, including Scripture, counsel, conscience, correction, church order, family responsibility, and the plain dealings of God. When Paul says a bishop must be “not selfwilled” (Titus 1:7), he is saying that a man cannot be trusted to oversee God’s flock if he cannot bring his own will under God’s government.

That is serious because leadership magnifies character. A selfwilled man in private life is trouble. A selfwilled man in leadership is dangerous. If he gets authority, he will confuse his will with God’s will. He will make his preferences sound like doctrine. He will treat disagreement as rebellion. He will surround himself with people who do not question him. He will resent correction because he thinks oversight means ownership. That is why Paul places “not selfwilled” in the qualifications for a bishop. The church does not need a man who must always have his own way. It needs a steward. Paul says a bishop is “the steward of God” (Titus 1:7). A steward manages what belongs to another. The church is not his property. The sheep are not his possession. The pulpit is not his throne. The ministry is not his personal empire. If he is selfwilled, he will forget that.

Peter connects self-will with despising government. “But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government” (2 Peter 2:10). Then he says, “Presumptuous are they, selfwilled.” That is the spirit. The selfwilled man despises restraint. He hates anything over him. He may use the language of liberty, but often he means lawlessness. He may claim to reject man-made control, and sometimes that is a legitimate concern, but his deeper issue is that he does not want to be governed at all. He does not want Scripture to tell him no. He does not want a pastor to warn him. He does not want a brother to rebuke him. He does not want a wife, husband, parent, elder, employer, or authority to cross him. The Bible says such a spirit is presumptuous. It assumes rights God never gave it.

Chapter 2: Self Will Dresses Itself As Strength

Self-will rarely introduces itself honestly. It does not usually say, “I am stubborn flesh, and I refuse to submit to God.” It dresses itself as strength. It says, “I am just strong.” It says, “I am independent.” It says, “I am not like these weak people who let others tell them what to do.” It says, “I follow God, not man,” even when the issue is not man versus God but self versus correction. It says, “I have discernment,” when really it has suspicion. It says, “I am standing,” when really it is refusing to bow. The flesh is a master at renaming sin. Stubbornness becomes conviction. Pride becomes courage. Rebellion becomes authenticity. Isolation becomes separation. Bitterness becomes boundaries. Self-will becomes leadership.

But Bible strength is not the same as self-will. Moses was meek, yet he stood before Pharaoh. Paul was bold, yet he submitted to the Lord. The Lord Jesus Christ was the strongest man who ever walked the earth, yet He said, “not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). Strength is not proven by always getting your way. Strength is proven by obeying God even when your flesh wants another way. Any fool can insist. Any rebel can resist. Any proud man can dig in his heels. But it takes spiritual strength to humble yourself under God’s mighty hand. “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time” (1 Peter 5:6). That is not weakness. That is faith.

The selfwilled man often thinks submission means defeat. He cannot stand the thought of yielding because yielding feels like losing control. But the Christian life is not about control. It is about surrender to God. “Submit yourselves therefore to God” (James 4:7). That is the command. Before resisting the devil, the believer must submit to God. A man who will not submit to God is not ready to resist anything properly. He may be loud. He may be combative. He may call himself a fighter. But if he is selfwilled, his fight is contaminated by his flesh. The question is not whether a man can stand against people. The question is whether he can bow before God. Until he can, his strength is only rebellion with muscles.

Chapter 3: Self Will Refuses Correction

A selfwilled person hates correction because correction challenges the throne. The proud man may tolerate general preaching against sin as long as it stays general. He may say amen when the preacher rebukes the world, the liberals, the Catholics, the modern versions, the compromisers, the hypocrites, or the obvious sinners. But when the word of God touches his own will, he stiffens. Suddenly he becomes a critic of tone, timing, delivery, motive, personality, and method. The issue is no longer truth. The issue is escape. The selfwilled heart will look for any door out of correction because correction means someone besides self has authority.

The Bible says, “He, that being often reproveth hardeneth his neck, shall suddenly be destroyed, and that without remedy” (Proverbs 29:1). That verse is a terrible warning. The issue is not a man who never heard. It is a man who was “often reproveth.” He had warnings. He had opportunities. He had voices. He had Scripture. He had conscience. He had providential checks. But he hardened his neck. That is the physical picture of self-will. The neck will not bend. The head will not bow. The man is stiff. He may think he is standing strong, but the Bible says destruction is coming suddenly and without remedy. There is a point where stubbornness becomes a death march.

Correction is not hatred. The selfwilled age thinks any rebuke is abuse, any warning is control, any correction is toxicity, and any authority is oppression. But Scripture says, “Faithful are the wounds of a friend; but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful” (Proverbs 27:6). A selfwilled person wants kisses, not wounds. He wants affirmation, not truth. He wants people around him who will agree with his will and call it support. But a faithful friend may wound him with truth. A faithful preacher may wound him with Scripture. A faithful church may wound him by refusing to flatter his sin. Those wounds are mercy. The kisses of an enemy feel better, but they lead to ruin. Better to be wounded by truth than comforted into destruction.

Chapter 4: Self Will Uses God Language

One of the most dangerous forms of self-will is when it uses God language. The selfwilled person says, “God told me,” when what he really means is, “I want this.” He says, “I feel led,” when he means, “I refuse to listen.” He says, “I have peace,” when he means, “I have silenced conviction long enough to proceed.” He says, “The Lord knows my heart,” as if that should comfort him instead of terrify him. The Bible says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). The fact that God knows the heart is not a hiding place for self-will. It is a warning.

This is where discernment is needed. God can lead His people. The Holy Ghost does guide. The Lord can burden a heart, direct steps, open doors, shut doors, and give wisdom. But God will not lead a man contrary to His written word. He will not lead a believer into rebellion and call it peace. He will not lead a man to despise authority and call it spiritual maturity. He will not lead someone to refuse correction and call it conviction. “Thy word is truth” (John 17:17). The written word is the judge of the inward impression. A selfwilled person reverses that order. He judges Scripture by his impression. If a verse agrees with his will, he receives it. If a verse crosses his will, he explains it away.

This is why the Bible believer must be careful with the phrase “the Lord told me.” Many people use that phrase to make their own will untouchable. Once they say “God told me,”

they think nobody can question them without questioning God. That is dangerous. The Bereans were noble because they searched the Scriptures daily, “whether those things were so” (Acts 17:11). They did not even take apostolic preaching without comparing it with Scripture. How much more should modern claims, impressions, burdens, dreams, leadings, and declarations be tested by the Book? Self-will loves unaccountable spirituality. Bible faith welcomes the light.

Chapter 5: Self Will Despises Government

Peter links the selfwilled spirit with those who “despise government” (2 Peter 2:10). That does not mean every human authority is always right, nor does it mean a believer must obey man rather than God. The apostles said, “We ought to obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29). There is a place for righteous refusal when man commands what God forbids or forbids what God commands. But that is not the same as a general spirit that hates restraint. The selfwilled person does not merely resist wicked authority. He despises government as a principle because government means his will is not absolute.

God has established order in life. There is order in the home, order in the church, order in labor, order in society, and order in the spiritual walk. The flesh hates order when order crosses desire. Children do not want parental correction. Wives and husbands can resist their biblical duties. Church members can reject pastoral oversight. Employees can resent employers. Citizens can despise lawful authority. Preachers can reject accountability. The issue differs by station, but the root can be the same: self wants no government above itself. That spirit is not liberty. It is rebellion.

The selfwilled man often claims he is only rejecting abuse, and sometimes abuse is real and must be addressed. But self-will uses real abuses as an excuse to reject all authority. Because one pastor was wrong, no pastor can correct him. Because one parent failed, no parent deserves honor. Because one institution was corrupt, all order is suspect. Because some men misuse authority, the selfwilled heart concludes that self should be the final authority. That is not biblical discernment. That is overcorrection into rebellion. The Bible never teaches blind submission to wickedness, but it also never teaches the enthronement of self as the cure for abused authority. The cure for bad government is not no government. The cure is God’s government rightly ordered by the word of God.

Chapter 6: Gethsemane Exposes The Lie Of Self Will

The Garden of Gethsemane exposes the lie that self-will is strength. There stands the Lord Jesus Christ, facing the cup, facing betrayal, facing false accusation, facing the cross, facing the wrath connected with bearing sin, and He prays, “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). That is not weakness. That is perfect obedience. That is

perfect submission. That is perfect Sonship. The strongest will in human history was not selfwilled. It was surrendered to the Father. If the sinless Son of God submitted His human will to the Father, what business does a sinful man have acting as though submission is beneath him?

Gethsemane also shows that submission can involve agony. The Lord's prayer was not a casual phrase. Luke says, "And being in an agony he prayed more earnestly" (Luke 22:44). Biblical submission is not always emotionally easy. Sometimes the flesh trembles. Sometimes the burden is heavy. Sometimes the path is dark. Sometimes obedience costs. The selfwilled person uses difficulty as evidence that he should not obey. If it hurts, he refuses. If it costs, he calls it bondage. If it crosses desire, he calls it unloving. But Christ obeyed through agony. That means emotional difficulty does not cancel God's will. The cross was not easy, but it was the Father's will.

The difference between Lucifer's "I will" and Christ's "not my will" is the difference between rebellion and redemption. Lucifer reached for a throne. Christ went to a cross. Lucifer exalted himself. Christ humbled Himself. Lucifer wanted to be like the most High. Christ, being equal with God, took upon Him the form of a servant. "And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:8). That is the pattern for the believer. The Christian life is not the triumph of my will under Christian language. It is the surrender of my will under the lordship of Jesus Christ.

Chapter 7: The Cure Is A Broken Will Before God

The cure for self-will is not a weak personality. Some people confuse humility with passivity, and they think the answer is to become spineless, fearful, and unable to make decisions. That is not Bible humility. A broken will before God does not mean a broken backbone before men. The same Paul who submitted to Christ also rebuked error, endured persecution, withstood Peter to the face, and preached boldly before kings. The issue is not whether a man has courage. The issue is whether his courage is governed by God or by self. A surrendered man can be bold. A selfwilled man can be bold too, but his boldness smells like flesh.

A broken will says, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" (Acts 9:6). That was Saul of Tarsus when the Lord met him. Before that, Saul was religious, zealous, active, educated, and wrong. He thought he was serving God while fighting Christ. Then the Lord knocked him down, and Saul's first real prayer was not, "Let me explain my vision." It was, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" That is the right posture. Not my program. Not my ambition. Not my reputation. Not my interpretation of my own greatness. Lord, what wilt Thou have me to

do? The selfwilled man cannot pray that honestly because he already knows what he wants to do and merely wants God to bless it.

The surrendered will must be maintained daily. Self-will does not die once and never stir again. The Lord said, “take up his cross daily” (Luke 9:23). Daily, self must be denied. Daily, the will must be submitted. Daily, Scripture must outrank feelings. Daily, obedience must outrank desire. Daily, the believer must pray in spirit, “not my will, but thine, be done.” That is not a prayer for Gethsemane only. It is a way of life. If Christ is Lord, then the will of self cannot remain king. The question every believer must face is simple: when God’s word crosses my will, which one bows?

Conclusion

Selfwilled is one of the strongest words in the King James Bible for exposing the final hardening of self-love. Self-love begins with affection for self, but self-will becomes government by self. It is the point where man stops merely talking about feelings and begins resisting authority. He refuses correction, refuses counsel, refuses rebuke, refuses oversight, refuses submission, and often refuses the plain sense of Scripture when Scripture crosses his desires. He may call it strength. God calls it selfwilled. He may call it authenticity. God calls it presumption. He may call it being led. God tests it by the written word.

This sin is especially dangerous because it can look spiritual. The selfwilled person can quote verses, talk about liberty, claim guidance from God, reject correction as legalism, and treat every warning as an attack. But the Bible links self-will with despising government and walking after the flesh. “Presumptuous are they, selfwilled” (2 Peter 2:10). That is not a compliment. A selfwilled spirit is not proof that a man is strong in the Lord. It may be proof that the old man has learned religious vocabulary. True strength bows to God. True faith submits to Scripture. True humility receives correction. True discipleship says no to self and yes to Christ.

The Lord Jesus Christ gives the final answer in Gethsemane: “not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42). That one sentence destroys the throne of self. Lucifer said, “I will.” Christ said, “not my will.” The self-love generation says, “My will.” The Bible believer must say, “Thy will.” That is the dividing line. Until a man’s will bows, his religion is still dangerous. Until self comes down, Christ is not truly preeminent in that area. The cure is not more self-expression, self-affirmation, or self-discovery. The cure is surrender to God under the authority of the King James Bible, with the old man denied, the cross taken up daily, and the heart trained to pray, “Lord, not my will, but thine, be done.”

10 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - Vain Glory

Paul writes, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). That verse is a sword through the heart of religious self-promotion. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory.” Nothing. Not preaching. Not singing. Not writing. Not giving. Not serving. Not debating. Not posting. Not teaching. Not sacrificing. Not suffering. Not helping. Not leading. Nothing. The Holy Ghost does not give the old man one corner of ministry where he is allowed to build himself a little throne and call it service. Vainglory is empty glory. It is glory without weight, shine without substance, appearance without reality, reputation without humility, performance without surrender, and public spirituality without a crucified heart. It is the desire to be seen as something, even when God knows there is nothing there worth boasting about.

That is why vainglory belongs in this series on “lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2). Self-love does not merely want comfort. It wants recognition. It wants to be seen as important, gifted, deep, spiritual, special, wounded, anointed, wise, necessary, courageous, persecuted, misunderstood, or unusually useful. It does not always boast like a drunk in a tavern. Sometimes it boasts like a saint in a church pew. Sometimes it boasts behind a pulpit. Sometimes it boasts with tears in its eyes. Sometimes it boasts through a testimony. Sometimes it boasts through a prayer request. Sometimes it boasts through constant self-reference disguised as vulnerability. Sometimes it boasts by saying, “I do not want any attention,” while carefully making sure everyone notices the sacrifice. Flesh is a sly thing. It can turn almost anything into a mirror.

Paul’s answer is not better religious branding. It is not learning how to promote yourself with more humble-sounding language. It is not using Christian phrases to sanitize ego. Paul’s answer is “lowliness of mind,” and then he points straight to Jesus Christ: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). That is the cure. Not the mind of the influencer. Not the mind of the performer. Not the mind of the celebrity pastor. Not the mind of the platform builder. The mind of Christ. And what did Christ do? “But made himself of no reputation” (Philippians 2:7). That phrase alone condemns a generation intoxicated with reputation. The Lord of glory made Himself of no reputation, while worms of the dust spend their lives trying to create one. That is the contrast: the empty glory of man versus the humility of the Saviour.

Chapter 1: Vainglory Is Empty Glory

The word itself tells the truth. Vainglory is vain glory. It is empty glory. It is the kind of glory that looks impressive from a distance but has no spiritual weight when God puts it on the

scale. Men may admire it. Crowds may applaud it. Followers may quote it. Churches may reward it. Platforms may amplify it. But heaven weighs differently than earth. What men call impressive, God may call vanity. What men call anointing, God may call performance. What men call boldness, God may call pride. What men call influence, God may call self-promotion. The Bible says, “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2). The Lord is not fooled by shine. He weighs the heart.

Vainglory is dangerous because it attaches itself to good things. It does not always show up in obvious sin. A man can be vain about wicked things, but he can also be vain about religious things. He can be vain about Bible knowledge, preaching ability, doctrinal sharpness, giving, separation, suffering, ministry labor, evangelism, prayer, fasting, writing, counseling, and public courage. That is why Paul says, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory” (Philippians 2:3). He is writing to believers. He is not warning pagans in a temple of idols. He is warning saints that even Christian service can be contaminated by the desire for empty glory. The deed may be right, but the motive can be rotten.

This is where many people miss it. They judge by the act alone. Did he preach? Did she sing? Did they serve? Did he give? Did she testify? Did they post Scripture? Did he take a stand? Those questions matter, but they are not enough. God judges the “thoughts and intents of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). A man may preach a true sermon and still secretly crave admiration. A woman may sing a true song and still hunger for praise. A believer may help someone and still hope the help becomes known. A writer may defend doctrine and still want to be thought brilliant. Vainglory is not always in the thing done. It is in the reason self wanted to be connected to the thing done. It is empty glory hiding inside religious action.

Chapter 2: Vainglory Feeds On Being Seen

The Lord Jesus warned about religious acts done “to be seen of men” (Matthew 6:1). That phrase exposes the appetite of vainglory. It wants to be seen. It does not merely want God to be obeyed. It wants self to be noticed obeying. It does not merely want truth spoken. It wants self to be recognized as the speaker. It does not merely want mercy shown. It wants self to be admired as merciful. It does not merely want prayer answered. It wants self to be known as a praying person. Jesus said, “Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them” (Matthew 6:1). Then He warns that if they do, they have no reward of the Father which is in heaven.

That is a terrible thought. A man can do religious work and receive the wrong reward. If the reward he wanted was attention, and he got attention, he may have received everything he was looking for. Jesus said of the hypocrites, “Verily I say unto you, They have their reward”

(Matthew 6:2). That is one of the most frightening statements in the Sermon on the Mount. They gave, and men saw it. They prayed, and men heard it. They fasted, and men noticed it. They got what they wanted. But heaven was not impressed. Their glory was vain because it was paid out in human attention. They traded eternal reward for temporary admiration. They chose the sound of men clapping over the approval of God.

This is not a warning against all visible service. Public ministry exists. Preaching is public. Singing can be public. Teaching can be public. Giving may sometimes become known. Paul's missionary labors were known. The issue is not whether men can see the act. The issue is whether being seen is the motive. The issue is whether the heart is performing for God or performing for people. A candle is meant to shine, but a performer is trying to be admired. Jesus said, "Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works," but then He gives the purpose, "and glorify your Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 5:16). That is the test. Do men see the work and glorify the Father, or do they see the work and glorify the performer?

Chapter 3: Vainglory In Preaching And Teaching

Vainglory in preaching is a foul thing because the pulpit should be the place where Christ is exalted and the preacher disappears behind the message. Paul said, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5). That verse should be nailed to every pulpit. We preach not ourselves. But religious flesh loves to preach itself. It may preach itself through personal stories, theatrical delivery, intellectual display, constant self-reference, emotional manipulation, or a style designed to make people admire the messenger. The Bible may be open, but the man may still be the center.

A preacher can become vain about being bold. That is a subtle trap. He can enjoy being known as hard, fearless, sharp, controversial, or unbending. Boldness is good when it is governed by God and charity. Paul asked for prayer "that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak" (Ephesians 6:20). But boldness becomes vainglory when the preacher loves the reputation of being bold more than he loves the souls he is preaching to. A man can hammer people just to hear the hammer ring. He can mistake harshness for holiness and volume for power. The flesh can even boast in how much it offends people. But Paul said to speak "the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). Truth without love becomes a weapon for ego. Love without truth becomes sentimental cowardice. The preacher needs both.

Teaching can be infected the same way. Knowledge can puff up. "Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth" (1 Corinthians 8:1). A teacher may love being thought deep. He may enjoy explaining what others missed. He may delight in sounding superior to the simple. He

may turn Bible truth into a ladder for self-exaltation. But the purpose of doctrine is not to make the teacher look brilliant. It is to establish saints in truth, glorify Christ, guard the church, and produce godliness. If a man teaches so people will say, "What a mind," he has his reward. If he teaches so people will say, "What a Saviour, what a Book, what truth," he is serving properly. The question is whether the lesson ends with admiration for the teacher or submission to the Lord.

Chapter 4: Vainglory In Singing And Worship

Vainglory in singing is especially dangerous because it hides behind the language of worship. A singer may say the right words, but the heart may want the wrong attention. The song says Jesus is worthy, while the flesh wants everyone to notice the voice. The hymn says glory to God, while the performer enjoys the emotional control of the room. The worship leader says, "This is all for Him," while the stage, camera, styling, lighting, and vocal display make it very easy for self to stand in the center. Again, public singing is not wrong. Skill is not wrong. Beauty is not wrong. But performance spirit can hijack holy things. The flesh can sing about the cross while standing on its own little throne.

The Bible says, "singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord" (Ephesians 5:19). To the Lord. That phrase judges the singer. Was it to the Lord, or was it to the crowd? Was the heart making melody to God, or was the flesh seeking admiration from people? Colossians says singing should involve "teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs" (Colossians 3:16). That means worship music is not a talent show. It is ministry under truth. If the song does not teach, admonish, exalt Christ, and direct the heart toward God, then it may be beautiful, but it is spiritually thin. If the singer draws attention away from the Lord and toward self, then the act has been corrupted.

This is why the spirit of the singer matters. A singer who trembles before God is safer than one who craves applause. A plain voice with a humble heart may minister more truly than a stunning voice full of vanity. God is not impressed by vocal runs, stage presence, emotional tremors, or carefully arranged religious atmosphere if the heart is full of self. The Lord said, "This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me" (Matthew 15:8). That can happen in song as easily as in speech. Lips can honor God while the heart performs for men. Vainglory turns worship into self-display. True worship says, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

Chapter 5: Vainglory In Service And Giving

Vainglory can also appear in serving. A person can help because help is needed and God is worthy, or he can help because being known as helpful feeds his sense of importance. The act may look identical from the outside. He volunteers, sacrifices, gives time, handles

burdens, shows up early, stays late, and does what others will not do. That can be godly. But it can also become a throne if the servant begins to need recognition. If no one notices, resentment grows. If someone else is thanked, bitterness appears. If the work is unseen, the zeal fades. That reveals the motive. Service done unto the Lord can survive being hidden. Service done for vainglory gets angry when the spotlight moves.

Paul said, “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Colossians 3:23). That verse tests all service. As to the Lord, not unto men. If a man serves as unto the Lord, he can continue when men overlook him. He can serve when no one claps. He can labor when no one posts his picture. He can give when no one prints his name. He can clean, carry, call, visit, help, pray, and support quietly because the Lord sees. But if he is serving unto men, he must be paid in attention. Without praise, the work becomes unbearable. That is not servant-heartedness. That is religious employment with applause as the wage.

Giving can be infected the same way. Jesus warned against sounding a trumpet before giving, “as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets, that they may have glory of men” (Matthew 6:2). Notice the phrase again: “glory of men.” That is vainglory. The gift may help someone, but the motive is poisoned. The giver wants his name attached. He wants people to know. He wants a reputation for generosity. But Jesus says, “let not thy left hand know what thy right hand doeth” (Matthew 6:3). That does not mean all giving must be mathematically impossible to know about, but it does mean the heart should not feed on recognition. God sees in secret. For the humble, that is enough. For the vain, it is not.

Chapter 6: Vainglory In Debating And Suffering

Even contending for truth can become vainglory. A man can debate because truth matters, souls matter, error is dangerous, and Scripture must be defended. That is legitimate. Jude says to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 1:3). But a man can also debate because he loves winning, humiliating, being seen as sharp, collecting public victories, and making others admire his knowledge. The issue is not merely the content of the argument. It is the spirit behind it. If contending for the faith becomes an arena where self can flex, then even truth is being handled in the energy of the flesh.

That does not mean a Bible believer must become soft, evasive, or afraid to answer sharply when needed. The Lord Jesus called men hypocrites. Paul rebuked Peter publicly. Elijah mocked Baal’s prophets. There is a place for sharpness. But there is also a danger in loving the sharpness more than the truth. A man can become addicted to the rush of conflict. He can begin to need opponents because opponents give his ego something to conquer. Then

he is no longer simply defending truth. He is feeding self through controversy. The servant of the Lord must watch this carefully. Paul told Timothy, “the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient” (2 Timothy 2:24). That does not cancel contending, but it does condemn fleshly strife disguised as zeal.

Suffering can become vainglory too. That is a hard truth, but it is real. Some people suffer and glorify God through patience, endurance, and faith. Others turn suffering into a stage. They want to be seen as uniquely wounded, uniquely persecuted, uniquely burdened, uniquely misunderstood, or uniquely strong. Again, real suffering deserves compassion, but the flesh can even use pain as a way to draw attention. Paul suffered greatly, yet he did not turn suffering into a shrine to himself. When he spoke of infirmities, he said, “that the power of Christ may rest upon me” (2 Corinthians 12:9). The point was Christ’s strength, not Paul’s drama. If suffering makes self the constant subject, vainglory has found another costume.

Chapter 7: The Mind Of Christ Kills Vain Glory

Paul does not merely expose vainglory. He gives the cure. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). The cure begins with lowliness of mind. Not lowliness of performance. Not a fake humble voice. Not religious self-deprecation designed to attract compliments. Lowliness of mind. It is an inward posture where a man sees God rightly, sees himself soberly, and sees others charitably. It is the opposite of the swollen self. The lowly mind does not need to be the center. It is free to serve without applause because it is not starving for human glory.

Then Paul says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). The cure for vainglory is not merely trying harder to look humble. It is the mind of Christ. Christ “made himself of no reputation” (Philippians 2:7). No reputation. The phrase is devastating. The Lord Jesus Christ had all true glory, yet He did not come down here managing a public image like a religious celebrity. He took upon Him “the form of a servant.” He humbled Himself. He became obedient unto death. The vain man wants to appear greater than he is. Christ, who is greater than all, humbled Himself beyond human comprehension. That is the mind the believer is commanded to have.

The Father exalted Him. “Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him” (Philippians 2:9). That is the divine order. Christ humbled Himself, and God exalted Him. The flesh wants to exalt itself and then ask God to bless it. But the Bible says, “Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up” (James 4:10). Man-made glory is vain. God-given exaltation is not. The believer does not need to chase reputation. He needs to humble

himself under God. If God wants to lift him up, God can do it. If God wants him hidden, hidden is safe. If God wants him seen, then let him be seen as a servant pointing to Christ. The mind of Christ kills vainglory because it teaches the believer to choose obedience over image, service over recognition, and God's glory over man's applause.

Conclusion

Vainglory is empty glory, but it is one of the old man's favorite treasures. It can appear in preaching, singing, posting, serving, giving, debating, teaching, leading, and even suffering. It can wear boldness, humility, pain, sacrifice, knowledge, generosity, and worship as costumes. That is why Paul's command is so sweeping: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory" (Philippians 2:3). Nothing. God does not want the old man using ministry as a stage. He does not want self promoting itself through spiritual language. He does not want empty glory wearing the name of Jesus Christ like a badge.

The last-days crowd is full of "lovers of their own selves" (2 Timothy 3:2), and lovers of self will always be drawn to vainglory because vainglory gives self a religious mirror. It lets a man appear spiritual while feeding pride. It lets a singer appear worshipful while craving admiration. It lets a preacher appear bold while enjoying his own reputation. It lets a servant appear sacrificial while resenting hiddenness. It lets a sufferer appear deep while making pain the center of attention. But God weighs the heart. He knows what was done for Him and what was done for applause. He knows what was ministry and what was performance. He knows what was glory and what was vain.

The answer is the mind of Christ. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). The Saviour made Himself of no reputation. He took the form of a servant. He humbled Himself. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. That is the cure for the empty crown of religious performance. The believer does not need to be seen as important, gifted, deep, necessary, special, wounded, wise, or anointed. He needs Christ to be magnified. He needs self to go to the cross. He needs lowliness of mind. Let the world chase reputation. Let religious performers chase applause. The Bible believer has something better than vainglory. He has the glory of the Lord Jesus Christ, and that glory is never empty.

11 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - Wise In Their Own Eyes

The Bible says, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Then it says, "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall

direct thy paths” (Proverbs 3:6). Then it gives the warning that cuts the legs out from under the whole modern religion of self: “Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the LORD, and depart from evil” (Proverbs 3:7). There it is. The Bible does not tell a man to trust himself. It tells him to trust the Lord. It does not tell him to lean into his own understanding. It tells him not to lean unto it. It does not tell him to honor every inner feeling as truth. It tells him to fear the Lord. It does not tell him to follow his heart. It tells him to depart from evil. That passage is a direct contradiction to the spirit of this age, where every man thinks his own emotions are a compass, his own opinions are wisdom, his own wounds are authority, and his own experience is a private revelation from heaven.

This is one of the most dangerous marks of self-love because it does not always look like arrogance at first. Sometimes it looks like sincerity. A person says, “I just feel like...” and suddenly that feeling is treated like doctrine. Another says, “This is my truth,” and somehow personal experience is placed above the word of God. Another says, “The Lord knows my heart,” as if that should end the discussion, when the Bible says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). Another says, “I have peace about it,” when the so-called peace may be nothing more than the flesh finally getting what it wanted. Another says, “I was hurt, so nobody can tell me how to process this,” and the wound becomes a throne. This is how self-love turns inward feelings into outward authority. It takes what is unstable, fallen, biased, emotional, and often blind, and then it treats it as if it were the Holy Ghost.

The Bible never commands a believer to despise wisdom. The issue is not wisdom itself. The issue is wisdom in your own eyes. There is a godly wisdom that comes from above, and there is a fleshly wisdom that comes from beneath. James says, “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish” (James 3:15). Earthly, sensual, devilish. That is what happens when man’s wisdom is cut loose from the fear of God and the authority of Scripture. It may sound compassionate, sophisticated, therapeutic, empowering, educated, and modern, but if it contradicts the Book, it is not spiritual wisdom. It is fallen flesh with a vocabulary. The answer is not to throw away thinking. The answer is to humble the mind under the King James Bible and trust the Lord more than the inner voice of fallen flesh.

Chapter 1: The Command Is Trust In The Lord

The first command in Proverbs 3:5 is not “trust your heart.” It is “Trust in the LORD with all thine heart.” That means the heart is not the object of trust. The Lord is. The heart is to be engaged in trust, but the Lord is the one trusted. That distinction is enormous. Modern religion tells people to look within and find guidance. The Bible tells people to look above and trust God. The heart is not the compass. The Lord is. The heart is not the judge. The

Lord is. The heart is not the final court. The word of God is. “Thy word is true from the beginning” (Psalm 119:160). A man’s feelings change before breakfast. God’s word is true from the beginning.

The command says “with all thine heart.” That is not half-trust, partial trust, occasional trust, or trust after self has exhausted every other possibility. It is full dependence upon the Lord. The problem is that self-love wants the Lord as an advisor, not as the authority. It wants God’s blessing on self’s decision. It wants prayer as a rubber stamp for what the flesh already selected. It wants confirmation, not correction. It wants comfort, not command. But trusting the Lord means the believer comes to God ready to be directed, corrected, crossed, slowed down, stopped, humbled, or redirected according to truth. Trust is not telling God what you want Him to bless. Trust is yielding the path to Him.

This strikes directly at the self-centered age. The world says, “Believe in yourself.” The Bible says, “Trust in the LORD.” The world says, “You know what is best for you.” The Bible says, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself” (Jeremiah 10:23). The world says, “Follow your heart.” The Bible says the heart is deceitful. The world says, “Your feelings are valid.” The Bible says, “He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool” (Proverbs 28:26). There is the collision. This is not a small disagreement in wording. These are two entirely different religions. One enthrones self. The other trusts God.

Chapter 2: Lean Not Unto Thine Own Understanding

Proverbs 3:5 continues, “and lean not unto thine own understanding.” The verse does not say a man has no understanding. It says do not lean on it. There is the key. Human understanding has a place when it is submitted to God, instructed by Scripture, corrected by truth, and governed by the fear of the Lord. But human understanding is a terrible crutch when it becomes independent. A rotten post can still look strong until weight is placed upon it. Then it breaks. Man’s own understanding is like that. It may sound reasonable, but if it is separated from God’s word, it will fail when the soul leans on it.

The modern age worships its own understanding. It calls it science when it wants authority, therapy when it wants comfort, authenticity when it wants permission, and progress when it wants rebellion. It produces educated fools who can explain the machinery of the body but do not know what a man is. It produces religious thinkers who can parse culture but cannot tremble at Scripture. It produces church leaders who know demographics, branding, leadership trends, and emotional atmosphere, but cannot preach “Thus saith the Lord” without apology. The Bible says, “Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools” (Romans 1:22). That is what happens when man’s understanding becomes independent from God.

The believer is warned not to lean on his own understanding because his understanding is affected by sin, fear, pride, desire, memory, pain, ambition, and limited knowledge. A man may think he sees clearly, but he often sees through fog. He may think he is being objective, but his flesh is in the courtroom bribing the judge. He may think he is discerning, when he is only suspicious. He may think he is compassionate, when he is only afraid to speak truth. He may think he is standing on principle, when he is only defending pride. That is why the mind must be renewed. “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). The mind does not need to be worshipped. It needs to be renewed.

Chapter 3: Be Not Wise In Thine Own Eyes

“Be not wise in thine own eyes” (Proverbs 3:7). That phrase names the disease. A man can be wise in God’s eyes or wise in his own eyes, and those two things are not the same. Being wise in your own eyes means self has become its own measuring stick. The person does not merely think. He trusts his thinking because it is his. He does not merely have opinions. He treats his opinions as insight. He does not merely have experiences. He treats his experiences as authority. He does not merely have feelings. He treats his feelings as revelation. That is self-love in the realm of the mind.

The Bible repeatedly warns about man’s own eyes. “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2). “The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise” (Proverbs 12:15). In Judges, the collapse of Israel is summarized this way: “every man did that which was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25). That is not liberty. That is chaos. When every man becomes his own judge, his own prophet, his own priest, his own authority, and his own final interpreter, the result is not enlightenment. It is spiritual anarchy.

This is exactly where the culture is now. “My truth” is just “right in his own eyes” with modern clothes on. “Follow your heart” is just “lean unto thine own understanding” with a soft voice. “Honor your feelings” is just fallen man treating the inner world as holy. “No one can tell me who I am” is just self refusing outside authority. But the Bible says, “Be not wise in thine own eyes.” God does not ask man to enthrone his perception. He commands him to fear the Lord. The fear of the Lord is not decorative religion. “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom” (Proverbs 9:10). Without that fear, man’s wisdom is a blind man describing colors.

Chapter 4: Feelings Are Not Doctrine

One of the great lies of the age is that feelings should be treated as truth. People now speak as if the fact that they feel something deeply means that thing has moral authority. But

feelings are not doctrine. Feelings are real in the sense that people truly experience them, but real does not mean reliable. A man can sincerely feel wrong. He can feel justified in bitterness. He can feel peaceful in disobedience. He can feel offended by correction. He can feel attracted to sin. He can feel abandoned when God is working. He can feel confident when he is headed toward a fall. Feelings need to be judged by truth, not truth by feelings.

The Bible gives many examples of feelings that had to be corrected. Elijah felt alone and said, "I, even I only, am left" (1 Kings 19:10), but God had reserved seven thousand. Jacob felt all things were against him, but God was preserving Joseph. The disciples were afraid in the storm, but Christ was in the ship. Feelings can scream loudly while truth stands quietly. That is why a believer cannot let his emotional state become a counterfeit Holy Ghost. The Holy Ghost leads according to truth. He does not contradict Scripture to validate flesh. Jesus said, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13). The Spirit of truth will not lead a man into a lie just because the lie feels healing.

Self-love turns feelings into doctrine because feelings keep self at the center. If I feel it, it must be honored. If I am hurt, I cannot be corrected. If I am uncomfortable, the message must be wrong. If I feel peace, the decision must be right. If I feel judged, the other person must be unloving. That is childish spirituality. The Bible says, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls" (Proverbs 25:28). Feelings must be governed. They must be brought under the rule of Scripture. A believer can acknowledge feelings without obeying them. He can say, "This is what I feel, but this is what God said." That is maturity.

Chapter 5: Wounds Are Not Authority

This generation has learned to turn wounds into authority. If a person has been hurt, he is often treated as untouchable. His pain becomes a pulpit. His trauma becomes doctrine. His story becomes a shield against correction. His experience becomes the lens through which every verse, church, preacher, relationship, and command must be interpreted. Compassion for suffering is right. The Bible says, "weep with them that weep" (Romans 12:15). But compassion does not require surrendering truth to pain. A wound may explain why a person struggles, but it does not give the flesh permission to rule.

The Lord Jesus Christ was wounded beyond any man, yet He never sinned. "Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth" (1 Peter 2:22). He was betrayed, mocked, falsely accused, beaten, rejected, and crucified. Yet when He suffered, "he threatened not; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously" (1 Peter 2:23). There is the pattern. He

did not turn wounds into rebellion. He did not use suffering as a reason to depart from the Father's will. In Gethsemane He prayed, "not my will, but thine, be done" (Luke 22:42). If the sinless Son of God submitted through suffering, then a wounded sinner has no right to use pain as a throne.

This must be said because much modern church language has become afraid of wounded people in the wrong way. It treats pain as though it automatically produces wisdom. It does not. Pain can soften a person, but it can also harden him. Pain can make a person compassionate, but it can also make him self-absorbed. Pain can bring a person to God, but it can also become the excuse for bitterness, suspicion, rebellion, and self-protection. The Bible says, "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you" (Hebrews 12:15). A wound not brought under grace can become a root of bitterness. That root does not deserve a crown. It needs to be judged by Scripture and healed under God.

Chapter 6: Preference Is Not The Holy Ghost

Self-love also turns personal preference into spiritual authority. A person likes something, so he calls it God's leading. He dislikes something, so he calls it conviction. He feels comfortable somewhere, so he calls it peace. He feels challenged somewhere, so he calls it a check in his spirit. That kind of language can sound spiritual, but often it is just preference wearing a halo. The Holy Ghost is real, and His leading is real, but the Spirit of God does not exist to sanctify every personal taste. He glorifies Christ and guides into truth. "He shall glorify me" (John 16:14). That is what Jesus said of the Spirit.

The believer must learn to distinguish between preference and principle. Preference says, "I like this." Principle says, "God said this." Preference may be harmless in its place. People have different tastes in food, music arrangements, schedules, clothing styles, methods, and temperaments. Not every preference is sin. But when preference is elevated to doctrine, trouble begins. A man may prefer a certain style and then condemn everyone who does not share it. Another may prefer a certain emotional atmosphere and call every serious service dead. Another may prefer softer preaching and call Bible rebuke unloving. Another may prefer his own interpretation and call disagreement persecution. That is not spirituality. That is self enthroning taste.

The Bible says, "Prove all things; hold fast that which is good" (1 Thessalonians 5:21). Proving requires a standard outside the self. The standard is not how I feel, what I prefer, what I have experienced, or what my inner voice says. The standard is the word of God. "To the law and to the testimony" (Isaiah 8:20). The self-centered man asks, "Does this feel right to me?" The Bible believer asks, "What saith the scripture?" (Romans 4:3). That one

question saves a man from a thousand deceptions. What saith the scripture? Not what saith my mood. Not what saith my wound. Not what saith my circle. Not what saith my preference. What saith the Scripture?

Chapter 7: The Renewed Mind Bows To Scripture

The answer to being wise in your own eyes is not to become stupid. The Bible is not against wisdom, thinking, study, discernment, judgment, counsel, or understanding. The Bible is against man's mind acting independently from God. The cure is a renewed mind bowed under Scripture. Paul says, "be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2). The mind is not thrown away. It is renewed. It learns to think after God instead of after the world. It learns to judge feelings by truth. It learns to test experience by Scripture. It learns to distrust the flesh. It learns to fear the Lord.

A renewed mind is teachable. That is one of its marks. "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise" (Proverbs 12:15). A fool cannot be told anything because he already has himself for a teacher. A wise man can hear counsel. He can be corrected. He can reconsider. He can open the Bible and say, "Lord, show me where I am wrong." That kind of humility is rare in a self-love age. Everyone wants to be affirmed. Few want to be instructed. Everyone wants to be understood. Few want to be corrected. But the Bible believer must remain teachable because the flesh never becomes trustworthy.

A renewed mind also acknowledges the Lord in all ways. "In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:6). Not some ways. All ways. Private ways. Public ways. Family ways. Church ways. Business ways. Emotional ways. Doctrinal ways. Relational ways. Ministry ways. The believer brings every path under the Lord. He does not say, "This is my area, and God can have the rest." He acknowledges God in all of it. That is how the path is directed. The self-centered man says, "I will direct my path, and God can bless it." The Bible says acknowledge Him, and He shall direct thy paths. Direction belongs to the Lord, not the inner voice of fallen flesh.

Conclusion

"Be not wise in thine own eyes" (Proverbs 3:7) is a needed command in an age that worships the mirror. The world tells people to trust themselves, follow their heart, speak their truth, honor their feelings, and treat personal experience as the highest authority. But the King James Bible warns that man's own eyes, own heart, own understanding, and own way are dangerous when separated from the fear of God and the word of God. "Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the LORD pondereth the hearts" (Proverbs 21:2). That verse is the end of self-authority. Man may approve himself, but God weighs him.

Self-love makes a person wise in his own eyes because it cannot stand to be judged by something higher than self. It turns feelings into doctrine, opinions into convictions, wounds into authority, preferences into guidance, and inner impressions into a counterfeit Holy Ghost. It baptizes the heart even though God says the heart is deceitful. It crowns experience even though experience can be misread. It enthrones peace even though false peace can accompany disobedience. It uses the language of authenticity while rejecting the authority of truth. That is not wisdom. That is the old man teaching Sunday school.

The answer is not to stop thinking. The answer is to think under God. Trust in the Lord. Lean not unto thine own understanding. Acknowledge Him in all thy ways. Be not wise in thine own eyes. Fear the Lord. Depart from evil. That is the order. The Bible believer must put the mind under Scripture, the heart under truth, feelings under obedience, wounds under grace, and preferences under the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ. The world says, "Trust yourself." The Book says, "Trust in the LORD." One path leads to self-deception. The other leads to directed paths under the hand of God.

12 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - The Religion Of Identity

Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). There is the Christian life in one verse, and it is a direct rebuke to the modern religion of identity. Notice the words carefully. "I am crucified with Christ." Paul does not begin with self-discovery. He begins with crucifixion. "Nevertheless I live." He does not teach annihilation of the believer's personhood, duty, mind, heart, responsibility, or walk. He lives, but then he immediately corrects the direction of that life: "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." That phrase is the death sentence on every form of self-centered Christianity. "Yet not I." Not my old identity. Not my flesh. Not my reputation. Not my label. Not my emotional narrative. Not my wounded self enthroned as lord. Not my image, my story, my preferences, my personal truth, or my self-expression. Christ liveth in me.

This age is drunk on identity. It is not enough now for a person to have a name, a family, a duty, a soul, a conscience, and a responsibility before God. The world demands a label, a tribe, a category, a personal narrative, a public identity, a declaration of self, and then an audience required to affirm it. Men are told to discover who they are, express who they are, protect who they are, announce who they are, and demand that everyone else recognize who they are. Then this spirit walks into Christian language and begins wearing a cross. Suddenly believers become consumed with "who I am," "how I am seen," "what I feel," "what God thinks about me," "what my story means," "what my calling proves," and "what

my identity says about me.” The vocabulary may sound spiritual, but the center can still be self. The old man is still on stage. He just learned how to quote Ephesians.

The Bible does teach that the believer has an identity in Christ. That must be said clearly. A saved man is not what he was in Adam. He is redeemed, justified, sealed, accepted in the beloved, complete in Christ, born again, a member of the body of Christ, and seated in heavenly places in Christ Jesus. Those are glorious truths. But biblical identity in Christ does not enthrone self. It crucifies the old man and places the believer’s life in union with Christ. The point is not “look at me.” The point is “look what Christ has done.” The point is not self-expression. The point is Christ living in the believer. The point is not building a religious personality around myself. The point is that I am no longer my own, for I am bought with a price. “Therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God’s” (1 Corinthians 6:20). Identity in Christ is not a mirror for self-worship. It is a declaration that the old lord has been dethroned and Jesus Christ has taken possession.

Chapter 1: The World Has Made Identity A Religion

Identity has become a full-blown religion in this age. It has its doctrines, confessions, taboos, priesthood, rituals, sins, and punishments. The first commandment of this religion is simple: thou shalt affirm the self. The second is like unto it: thou shalt never question the self. The world says a person is whatever he feels, whatever he claims, whatever he names, whatever he desires, and whatever he demands others recognize. This is not wisdom. It is the old rebellion with a nametag. The Bible says, “God created man in his own image” (Genesis 1:27). The identity religion says man creates himself in his own image. That is the whole war in one sentence.

The world’s identity religion is built on self-definition. A man looks inward, finds desires, feelings, wounds, impulses, ambitions, memories, and preferences, and then builds a name out of them. But the Bible never teaches fallen man to look inward for final truth. The Bible says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jeremiah 17:9). That one verse destroys the shrine. The heart is not a prophet. The heart is not a holy compass. The heart is not the voice of God. The heart is deceitful above all things. If a person builds identity on the fallen heart, he is building a house on a liar. He may decorate it with sincerity, tears, therapy words, and public affirmation, but the foundation is still rotten.

The religion of identity is especially dangerous because it turns disagreement into blasphemy. If the self is sacred, then anyone who questions self is treated like a heretic. That is why correction is hated in this age. A preacher can rebuke sin, and suddenly he is accused of attacking someone’s identity. A Bible verse can define reality, and suddenly the

verse is called harmful. A Christian can speak truth, and suddenly truth is called violence because it crosses the throne of self. But the Bible says, “Let God be true, but every man a liar” (Romans 3:4). That is the order. God defines truth. Man does not. The creature does not get to redefine himself against the Creator and then demand heaven applaud.

Chapter 2: The Old Man Is Not To Be Celebrated

The modern identity religion tells people to celebrate the self. The Bible tells the believer something very different: the old man is to be crucified. Paul writes, “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him” (Romans 6:6). That is not celebration language. That is execution language. The old man is not to be polished, protected, platformed, renamed, affirmed, and sent out with a ministry logo. He is crucified with Christ. The old man does not become safe because he learns Christian vocabulary. The flesh does not become holy because it sings worship songs. The old identity is not sanctified by being discussed endlessly. It is judged at the cross.

Ephesians says, “That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts” (Ephesians 4:22). Put off. Not parade. Not explain. Not enthrone. Not build a brand around it. Put off. The old man is corrupt according to deceitful lusts. He does not need affirmation. He needs the cross. This is where modern Christianity often goes wrong. It tries to help people make peace with what God told them to put off. It encourages believers to keep staring at the old self as if hidden treasure is buried in that graveyard. But the Bible does not send a saved man back into Adam to find out who he is. It points him to Christ.

This does not mean a believer forgets that God saved him out of real sin, real pain, real history, and real circumstances. Testimony has a place. Paul remembered what he had been. He said he had been a blasphemer, persecutor, and injurious. But he did not build a ministry of self-fascination around his former identity. He said, “But I obtained mercy” (1 Timothy 1:13). The point was mercy. The point was Christ’s longsuffering. The point was grace. That is the difference between a Bible testimony and an identity shrine. A Bible testimony says, “Look what Christ saved me from and what grace has done.” The religion of identity says, “Look at me, understand me, affirm me, center me.” One glorifies Christ. The other keeps self alive.

Chapter 3: Biblical Identity Is In Christ

The believer’s identity is real, but it is located in Christ, not in self-expression. The New Testament repeatedly uses the phrase “in Christ.” “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Not if any man discovers himself. Not if any man affirms himself. Not if any man brands himself. “In Christ.” The location matters. The

believer is not made new by looking deeper into the old heart. He is made new by being placed in Christ. "Old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Corinthians 5:17). That is not the old identity getting a religious makeover. That is new creation.

Ephesians says God "hath made us accepted in the beloved" (Ephesians 1:6). Accepted where? "In the beloved." The believer is not accepted because self finally became impressive. He is accepted because he is in Christ. Colossians says, "And ye are complete in him" (Colossians 2:10). Complete where? "In him." Not complete in emotional self-recognition. Not complete in public affirmation. Not complete in personal branding. Complete in Him. The riches of the believer's standing are all tied to Christ. Redemption is in Christ. Forgiveness is in Christ. Righteousness is in Christ. Life is in Christ. Hope is in Christ. Security is in Christ. Glory is in Christ. The believer's identity is Christ-centered or it is not biblical.

That means biblical identity humbles the believer. It does not inflate him. If everything I have is in Christ, then I have no room to boast in myself. "What hast thou that thou didst not receive?" (1 Corinthians 4:7). My salvation was received. My righteousness was received. My standing was received. My spiritual life was received. My gifts were received. My understanding was received. My hope was received. The identity religion says, "I am something." The Bible says, "For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself" (Galatians 6:3). The Christian's glory is not in being something in himself. His glory is that Christ is everything and grace has placed him in Christ.

Chapter 4: Yet Not I

Galatians 2:20 turns the whole identity obsession upside down with three words: "yet not I." Paul does not say, "At last I found the real me." He says, "yet not I." That does not mean Paul lost his personality, memory, responsibility, or usefulness. He still preached. He still wrote. He still suffered. He still reasoned. He still loved. He still labored. But the controlling center was no longer Paul. Christ lived in him. His life was not self-originated, self-defined, self-directed, or self-glorifying. It was Christ's life manifest through a redeemed man.

Those words are unbearable to the self-love generation. "Yet not I" is the phrase modern religion avoids. Everything now is "yet I." Yet my feelings. Yet my calling. Yet my story. Yet my wounds. Yet my truth. Yet my purpose. Yet my platform. Yet my identity. Yet my season. Yet my influence. Yet my dream. Yet my destiny. Modern Christianity often takes the language of grace and uses it to keep "I" in the center. Paul says the opposite. He says, "yet not I." The

Christian life is not Christ helping self become the star. It is Christ replacing self as the life, Lord, and glory of the believer.

This phrase also guards against false humility. A man can say “yet not I” with his mouth while still arranging everything around himself. He can talk about Christ while building his name. He can say he is nothing while needing everyone to notice how nothing he is. The real test is not the phrase alone, but the direction of the life. Is Christ magnified? Is the word obeyed? Is the flesh denied? Is the old man judged? Is the will surrendered? Is the believer willing to be hidden if Christ is honored? Paul said, “For to me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). That is what “yet not I” looks like when it walks. Life is Christ, not self dressed in religious clothing.

Chapter 5: Identity Language Can Become A Mirror

There is a proper way to talk about who the believer is in Christ. The Bible does it. But there is also a corrupt way to use identity language that turns doctrine into a mirror. A believer can become so obsessed with “who I am in Christ” that the phrase subtly shifts from Christ to I. The truth is meant to strengthen faith, humility, gratitude, and obedience. But the flesh can twist it into self-admiration. It can take “accepted in the beloved” and turn it into “look how valuable I am.” It can take “chosen in him” and turn it into “look how special I am.” It can take “complete in him” and turn it into “look how important I am.” That is a subtle corruption.

The problem is not the doctrine. The problem is the old man using the doctrine. A proud heart can turn any truth into fuel for self. A man can be proud of grace, proud of election, proud of separation, proud of suffering, proud of knowledge, proud of humility, and proud of being against pride. The flesh is that crooked. That is why the cross must stay central. The believer’s identity in Christ must never be separated from crucifixion with Christ. Galatians 2:20 keeps both together: “I am crucified with Christ” and “Christ liveth in me.” If you talk about life in Christ while avoiding death to self, your identity doctrine will become spiritual narcissism.

Biblical identity should make a believer more grateful, not more self-absorbed. It should make him worship, not pose. It should make him obedient, not entitled. It should make him humble, not untouchable. It should make him love the brethren, not demand constant recognition. It should make him serve, not perform. If identity language makes self larger, something has gone wrong. The Holy Ghost does not reveal Christ’s work so the old man can admire himself in it. Jesus said of the Spirit, “He shall glorify me” (John 16:14). The Spirit’s ministry is Christ-glorifying, not ego-inflating. Any identity teaching that leaves Christ in the background and self in the foreground has missed the mark.

Chapter 6: Labels Cannot Replace Life

The identity religion loves labels. The right label becomes a badge, a shield, a weapon, and sometimes a substitute for actual life. The world is full of labels, and many people now live as though naming themselves is the same as knowing themselves. This has crept into Christian circles too. People collect labels for doctrine, personality, suffering, gifting, ministry, background, and experience. Labels can sometimes clarify a position or describe a reality, but they can also become idols. A man can spend more time defending a label than walking with God. He can become more loyal to the label than to Scripture. He can use a label to avoid growth, correction, and obedience.

The Bible does not deny that words matter. Names and descriptions matter. Doctrine matters. But life in Christ is more than a label. A man can call himself a Bible believer and still be full of pride. He can call himself separated and still be self-righteous. He can call himself grace-oriented and still be careless. He can call himself bold and still be cruel. He can call himself wounded and still be bitter. He can call himself called and still be selfwilled. Jesus said, “Wherefore by their fruits ye shall know them” (Matthew 7:20). Not merely by their labels. Fruit exposes what a label may hide.

Paul’s identity was not built on labels of self-importance. He could list his religious credentials in Philippians 3, but then he said, “But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ” (Philippians 3:7). He counted them loss. He did not build a shrine to his background. He did not make his old credentials the center of his message. He said, “that I may win Christ” (Philippians 3:8). That is the right direction. Labels, background, history, achievements, and experiences must all bow to Christ. The believer does not need to spend his life making sure everyone recognizes his category. He needs to know Christ, obey the Book, walk in the Spirit, and bear fruit.

Chapter 7: Union With Christ Is The Answer

The answer to the religion of identity is not to tell believers they have no identity. The answer is to preach union with Christ properly. “I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). That is union language. The believer is identified with Christ in death and life. Christ’s cross becomes the judgment of the old man. Christ’s life becomes the source of the new walk. Christ’s righteousness becomes the believer’s standing. Christ’s Spirit empowers the believer’s life. Christ’s glory becomes the believer’s hope. This is far greater than self-expression. It is spiritual union with the Son of God.

Union with Christ also gives the believer stability. If my identity is built on feelings, I will change every hour. If it is built on people’s approval, I will be tossed around by every

opinion. If it is built on performance, I will collapse when I fail. If it is built on wounds, I will remain chained to pain. If it is built on labels, I will be governed by categories. But if it is built on Christ, then I stand where He placed me. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). That is security. My life is hid with Christ in God. Not displayed in the marketplace of self. Hid with Christ.

Union with Christ also gives the believer direction. The next verse says, "When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory" (Colossians 3:4). Christ is our life. Not self. Not identity. Not reputation. Not story. Not pain. Not platform. Christ. If Christ is our life, then the Christian life is not an endless project of self-definition. It is a walk of faith in the Son of God. Paul said in Galatians 2:20, "and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God." That is the path. The believer lives in the flesh, but not after the flesh. He lives by faith, not by self-invention. He lives because Christ lives in him.

Conclusion

The religion of identity is one of the most powerful forms of self-love in this age. It teaches people to build life around who they think they are, how they want to be seen, what they feel, what label defines them, what story they want affirmed, and what inner voice they have chosen to obey. The world has turned identity into a shrine, and much of modern Christianity has borrowed the language without always testing the spirit behind it. But the Bible does not tell the believer to enthrone the old self. It tells him, "I am crucified with Christ" (Galatians 2:20). The old identity does not get a throne. It gets the cross.

Biblical identity in Christ is glorious, but it is not self-worship. The believer is redeemed, accepted, justified, sealed, complete, and alive in Christ. But every one of those blessings points back to Christ, not to the greatness of self. The believer is not accepted in himself. He is accepted in the beloved. He is not complete in himself. He is complete in Him. He is not alive because he discovered his personal truth. He is alive because Christ lives in him. Grace does not make the old man more admirable. Grace makes Christ more precious. It teaches the believer to say, "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

So let the world keep baptizing self-definition. Let the age keep demanding affirmation. Let religious language keep getting twisted into a mirror for the flesh. The Bible believer must stay with the Book. The Christian life is not who I am apart from Christ, nor is it the old me dressed up in spiritual words. It is Christ in me, the hope of glory. It is the old man crucified, the new man put on, the life lived by faith, and the Saviour receiving the preeminence. The world says, "Find yourself." The Bible says, "ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). That is the better identity. Not self discovered. Christ living in me.

13 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - The Love Of Pleasure

Paul's last-days list does not stop with men being "lovers of their own selves" (2 Timothy 3:2). By the time the list develops, the self-loving crowd becomes "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:4). That is not an accident. Self-love eventually becomes pleasure-love because the self always wants to be pleased. The man who enthrones himself will soon enthrone whatever comforts, excites, entertains, feeds, soothes, flatters, and satisfies himself. Once self becomes the center, pleasure becomes the servant that waits on the throne. Then comfort becomes doctrine, appetite becomes lord, entertainment becomes devotion, convenience becomes guidance, and sacrifice becomes offensive. That is the course of the last-days spirit. It starts with man loving himself, and it ends with man loving whatever pleases himself more than he loves God.

This is where modern Christianity has become soft in a thousand places. It wants a Christianity without inconvenience, a church without conviction, a sermon without wounds, worship without holiness, fellowship without accountability, service without sacrifice, and grace without government. It wants blessing without burden, crowns without crosses, heaven without self-denial, and Jesus as Saviour without the daily refusal of the flesh. It chooses churches based on comfort, sermons based on mood, music based on emotion, friendships based on affirmation, ministries based on convenience, and beliefs based on what costs the least. The question is no longer, "What saith the scripture?" (Romans 4:3). The question becomes, "Does this make me feel good? Does this fit my life? Does this support my emotional condition? Does this require too much?" That is not Bible Christianity. That is pleasure running the church calendar.

Now, pleasure itself is not automatically sin. God made the body with lawful appetites. He gives good gifts. He gives rest, food, fellowship, marriage, music, beauty, and seasons of joy. The Bible does not command a believer to live like a stone in a cave pretending that all enjoyment is wicked. "Every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving" (1 Timothy 4:4). The issue is not whether pleasure exists. The issue is whether pleasure outranks God. Paul does not say they are lovers of pleasure in a lawful and thankful sense. He says they are "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." That is idolatry. When pleasure becomes the ruler, God's word becomes negotiable. When comfort becomes the compass, the cross becomes unreasonable. When appetite gets the throne, holiness becomes an interruption.

Chapter 1: Self Love Produces Pleasure Love

The progression in 2 Timothy 3 is spiritually exact. "Lovers of their own selves" becomes "lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (2 Timothy 3:2, 4). A man who loves himself

supremely will eventually love whatever serves himself. That is why the pleasure problem is not merely external. It is rooted in worship. The question is not simply what a man enjoys. The question is what he loves most. The heart has an altar, and whatever occupies that altar will direct the life. If self is on the altar, then pleasures become offerings brought to self. Comfort, entertainment, ease, applause, food, lust, money, travel, attention, amusement, luxury, and convenience all become servants of the self-throne.

This explains why people become offended when God interferes with their pleasure. They are not merely defending an activity. They are defending a god. A man can give up something he likes if God is truly first. But if that thing has become part of his worship system, he will fight to keep it. He will find teachers who excuse it, friends who normalize it, verses he can twist around it, and emotional arguments to protect it. He will say, "God wants me happy," as if happiness has replaced holiness. But the Bible says, "Be ye holy; for I am holy" (1 Peter 1:16). It does not say, "Be ye comfortable; for I am comfortable." God's aim is not to keep the flesh entertained on its way to heaven.

The flesh always wants pleasure without boundaries. It does not want God to define the limits. It wants appetite to decide. That is why Paul says of some, "Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things" (Philippians 3:19). Their god is their belly. That does not only apply to food. It describes appetite ruling the man. If appetite rules, it becomes god. The belly says eat, so he eats. Lust says look, so he looks. Entertainment says stay, so he stays. Comfort says avoid that sermon, so he avoids it. Convenience says skip service, so he skips it. Self says I need this, and pleasure says amen. That is not liberty. That is bondage with a smile on its face.

Chapter 2: Comfort Becomes Doctrine

One of the clearest marks of pleasure-driven Christianity is that comfort becomes doctrine. People begin to decide what is true by whether it comforts them. If a sermon makes them uncomfortable, they assume something must be wrong with the preacher. If a verse wounds their ego, they assume it has been misapplied. If a doctrine demands separation, sacrifice, or obedience, they call it legalism. If a warning produces fear, they call it unhealthy. The Bible is no longer allowed to rule. Comfort rules, and Scripture is only welcomed when it supports the emotional climate self prefers.

But God's word was never given merely to comfort the flesh. "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Timothy 3:16). Reproof and correction are part of the purpose of Scripture. A Bible that never makes you uncomfortable is either not being read honestly or

not being preached fully. The word of God is “sharper than any twoedged sword” (Hebrews 4:12). A sword cuts. It does not ask the flesh for permission. If a man rejects every sermon, verse, warning, or rebuke that disturbs his comfort, he is not protecting his soul. He is protecting his idol.

Comfort-driven doctrine produces weak saints. They cannot endure sound doctrine because sound doctrine often comes with sharp edges. Paul warned, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:3). Notice, they will not endure it. The issue is endurance. Sound doctrine requires the ability to sit under truth that may cross the will, expose the heart, rebuke the flesh, and demand change. But pleasure-love wants teaching “after their own lusts” (2 Timothy 4:3). It wants teachers that scratch where the flesh itches. If comfort becomes doctrine, the church becomes a spiritual spa instead of a place where the word of God trains soldiers.

Chapter 3: Entertainment Becomes Devotion

A pleasure-loving age turns entertainment into devotion. People give time, attention, money, emotion, conversation, loyalty, and imagination to amusement with a zeal they rarely give to God. They can sit for hours before screens, games, shows, sports, music, drama, and noise, but struggle to pray for fifteen minutes or read the Bible with attention. That reveals love. Jesus said, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matthew 6:21). Treasure is not only money. It is time, focus, affection, energy, and pursuit. If a man’s heart is constantly drawn to entertainment but must be dragged to Scripture, something is wrong.

This spirit has invaded churches too. The service must entertain. The sermon must keep attention like a performance. The music must create a sensation. The program must compete with the world’s amusements. The preacher must be funny enough, polished enough, casual enough, dramatic enough, and emotionally engaging enough to keep the consumers from getting bored. But the church is not called to out-entertain Babylon. It is called to preach the word. “Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine” (2 Timothy 4:2). That command does not sound like a show. It sounds like war.

Entertainment is not always sinful in itself. A person may enjoy lawful recreation, rest, humor, music, or a harmless activity without making it an idol. But when entertainment becomes the main food of the soul, the spirit weakens. When a believer cannot tolerate silence, prayer, serious reading, doctrinal preaching, or sober reflection because he is addicted to stimulation, entertainment has become a master. The Bible says, “Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth” (Colossians 3:2). A pleasure-driven

Christian sets his affection on what constantly stimulates him. A Bible believer must learn to enjoy what is lawful without letting earthly pleasures capture the heart.

Chapter 4: Convenience Becomes Guidance

Convenience is one of the false holy spirits of the modern church. People say, “The Lord opened the door,” when they often mean, “This was easy.” They say, “I do not have peace,” when they mean, “This requires effort.” They say, “God is leading me elsewhere,” when they mean, “This church, duty, relationship, or ministry no longer suits my comfort.”

Convenience becomes guidance when a person assumes the easier path must be the Lord’s path. But the Bible never teaches that the will of God is always the most convenient option. Sometimes the will of God is a wilderness, a prison, a shipwreck, a thorn, a cross, or a lonely stand.

Paul’s life alone destroys convenience Christianity. He wrote of labors, stripes, prisons, deaths, beatings, stoning, shipwreck, perils, weariness, painfulness, watchings, hunger, thirst, fastings, cold, nakedness, and care of the churches. That was not convenient. Yet it was in the path of God’s service. The Lord told Ananias concerning Paul, “I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name’s sake” (Acts 9:16). God did not say, “I will show him how comfortable ministry can be.” He said suffer. That does not mean every hardship proves you are in God’s will, but it does mean hardship does not prove you are out of it.

Convenience-driven guidance produces unstable Christians. They serve when it is easy, attend when it fits, give when there is extra, pray when desperate, witness when comfortable, and obey when obedience does not cost much. But the Lord said, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me” (Luke 9:23). Daily crosses are not convenient. Self-denial is not convenient. Following Christ is not arranged around the flesh’s calendar. The question is not, “What is easiest?” The question is, “What is right?” A believer who lets convenience govern him will always find a reason to avoid the cross.

Chapter 5: Sacrifice Becomes Offensive

A pleasure-driven Christianity finds sacrifice offensive. It can tolerate giving as long as it is convenient. It can tolerate service as long as it is recognized. It can tolerate holiness as long as it does not cost popularity. It can tolerate preaching as long as the sermon does not demand surrender. But when the Christian life begins to require sacrifice, the pleasure-loving heart recoils. It says, “That is too much.” It says, “God would not ask that of me.” It says, “I need balance,” when what it often means is, “I do not want a cross.” But the Bible is

filled with sacrifice. The Christian life is not built around preserving comfort. It is built around presenting the life to God.

Paul wrote, “I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice” (Romans 12:1). A living sacrifice. That is the exact opposite of the pleasure idol. A sacrifice does not climb onto the altar and negotiate comfort terms. It is presented to God. Paul calls this “your reasonable service.” Not extreme service. Not fanatic service. Reasonable service. In light of the mercies of God, it is reasonable for a saved man to yield his body to the Lord. The pleasure-loving age calls sacrifice unreasonable because it measures everything by self. Grace calls sacrifice reasonable because it measures everything by mercy.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not offer a cost-free discipleship. He said, “whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:27). That verse is not soft. It is not market-tested. It does not flatter consumers. Christ told people to count the cost. Modern Christianity often tries to hide the cost because it wants decisions, crowds, and numbers. But hiding the cost produces people who are shocked when obedience hurts. The church must recover the truth that sacrifice belongs to the Christian life. Not sacrifice to earn salvation, for salvation is by grace through faith, but sacrifice because Christ is worthy and the redeemed life no longer belongs to self.

Chapter 6: Pleasure Chooses Churches And Beliefs

The love of pleasure does not merely affect hobbies. It affects church choices and beliefs. People often choose churches based on what pleases them rather than what honors God. They choose the place where the music feels best, the preaching feels safest, the people affirm them most, the programs serve their family preferences, the schedule demands least, and the atmosphere matches their taste. Doctrine becomes secondary. Reverence becomes secondary. Holiness becomes secondary. Biblical preaching becomes secondary. The question becomes, “Do I like it?” instead of, “Is it faithful?”

The same thing happens with beliefs. Pleasure-driven people accept doctrines that comfort the flesh and reject doctrines that trouble it. They like grace if grace means no accountability. They like love if love means no correction. They like liberty if liberty means no restraint. They like blessings if blessings mean ease. They like heaven if heaven does not require repentance toward God and faith toward the Lord Jesus Christ. They like Jesus as compassionate, but not Jesus as Judge. They like the Saviour who receives sinners, but not the Lord who says, “Go, and sin no more” (John 8:11). They construct a version of Christianity that keeps their pleasures safe.

This is why Paul says people will “turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables” (2 Timothy 4:4). Pleasure-love makes truth hard to endure and fables easy to receive. A fable does not have to be an ancient myth. It can be any religious story that flatters the flesh against the truth. “God just wants me happy.” “My feelings are proof.” “My peace means I am right.” “A loving God would never judge.” “The church should never make me uncomfortable.” “If it is hard, it must not be God.” Those are modern fables. They please self. They excuse appetite. They protect comfort. But they are not Scripture.

Chapter 7: Loving God More Than Pleasure

The answer is not to become a miserable monk who thinks every good gift is wicked. The answer is to love God more than pleasure. The verse says “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:4). The issue is supreme love. God must be first. Lawful pleasures must remain servants, never masters. Good gifts must lead to thanksgiving, not idolatry. Rest must refresh service, not replace it. Food must be received with gratitude, not worshipped. Recreation must be governed by holiness, not become a hiding place from duty. Enjoyment must be held loosely, not clutched like a god.

The believer needs ordered loves. Jesus said the first and great commandment is, “Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind” (Matthew 22:37). All thy heart. All thy soul. All thy mind. That leaves no room for pleasure to sit above God. When God is loved supremely, pleasures can be judged rightly. Some will be received with thanksgiving. Some will be limited. Some will be refused. Some will be sacrificed for a season. Some will be abandoned permanently because they compete with God. Love for God gives the believer the power to say no to lesser loves.

Moses is an example of this. The Bible says he chose “rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25). Pleasures of sin are real, but they are seasonal. They do not last. Moses saw something better. He esteemed “the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt” (Hebrews 11:26). That is the cure. He valued Christ above Egypt’s pleasures. A believer will not overcome pleasure-love merely by gritting his teeth. He must see Christ as better. The superior love drives out the inferior love. When Christ is precious, pleasure loses its throne.

Conclusion

The love of pleasure is the mature fruit of the love of self. Paul’s last-days warning moves from “lovers of their own selves” to “lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God” (2 Timothy 3:2, 4). That is exactly what we are watching. The self-centered man becomes the pleasure-centered man because whatever pleases self becomes sacred to him. Comfort becomes doctrine. Appetite becomes lord. Entertainment becomes devotion.

Convenience becomes guidance. Sacrifice becomes offensive. Churches, sermons, songs, friendships, ministries, and beliefs are chosen by what satisfies self rather than what honors God.

This does not mean every pleasure is sinful. God's gifts can be received with thanksgiving. But when pleasure outranks God, it becomes an idol. When comfort overrides Scripture, it becomes an idol. When entertainment consumes the heart, it becomes an idol. When convenience directs obedience, it becomes an idol. When appetite rules the body, it becomes an idol. The Bible believer must not let lawful things become ruling things. "All things are lawful unto me, but I will not be brought under the power of any" (1 Corinthians 6:12). That is the point. If a pleasure has power over you, it is no longer merely a pleasure. It is a master.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not call men to a pleasure-centered life. He called them to deny themselves, take up the cross daily, and follow Him. That command cuts directly through the soft Christianity of the age. The Christian life has joy, peace, comfort, blessing, fellowship, and hope, but it also has sacrifice, discipline, obedience, chastening, separation, reproach, and a cross. The world says, "Please yourself." The Bible says, "love the Lord thy God." The last-days crowd loves pleasures more than God. The Bible believer must love God more than pleasure. When God is first, pleasure stays in its place. When pleasure is first, God's place has been stolen.

14 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - Esteeming Others Better

Paul gives the answer to the religion of self in one clean command: "Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). That verse stands against the whole self-love empire. The world says put yourself first. The Bible says esteem others better. The world says defend your ego. The Bible says lowliness of mind. The world says build your name. The Bible says let nothing be done through vainglory. The world says make sure you are seen, heard, validated, affirmed, and celebrated. The Bible says take the lower place and let Christ be seen. This is not natural to the flesh. The old man does not esteem others better than himself. The old man competes, compares, envies, boasts, resents, performs, demands recognition, and keeps score. That is why this passage is not just good advice. It is spiritual surgery.

The cure for selfishness is not self-hatred. That needs to be stated clearly because the modern crowd will always twist the doctrine. Biblical humility is not emotional collapse,

insecurity, self-abuse, cowardice, or pretending that God has given you no gifts, no duties, no responsibilities, and no place to serve. The Bible is not commanding a believer to walk around saying, “I am worthless,” hoping someone will call him humble. That can be pride wearing sackcloth. The cure for self-love is not hating the person God saved. The cure is dethroning the old man and receiving the mind of Christ. Paul says, “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). The answer is not a psychological trick. It is the mind of the Saviour. The believer is not called to make self larger or to pretend self does not exist. He is called to bring self under the cross so Christ can live through him.

The Lord Jesus Christ did not come down here as a self-promoter, religious celebrity, platform builder, reputation manager, or pulpit performer. He came as the Son of God in humility. “But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7). There is the pattern. No reputation. Form of a servant. Obedient unto death. The Lord of glory did not need to prove Himself to worms. He did not need a brand, a stage, a fan base, or a crowd’s approval to know who He was. He humbled Himself because the Father’s will was greater than public recognition. That is the mind believers must receive. Not self enthroned. Not self erased in false misery. Self humbled under God, serving others, and letting Christ have the preeminence. This essay calls the believer away from the mirror and back to the mind of Christ.

Chapter 1: Let Nothing Be Done Through Strife Or Vainglory

Paul begins by cutting off the two engines that drive much human behavior: strife and vainglory. “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory” (Philippians 2:3). Strife wants to win against others. Vainglory wants to be admired by others. Both are self-centered. Strife says, “I must beat him.” Vainglory says, “I must be seen above him.” Strife turns relationships into battlefields. Vainglory turns ministry into a stage. Strife fights for the upper hand. Vainglory performs for the spotlight. The Holy Ghost says let nothing be done through either one. Nothing. Not preaching. Not debating. Not singing. Not posting. Not serving. Not giving. Not correcting. Not leading. Nothing.

That command is necessary because religious flesh can make even good things filthy. A man can contend for truth through strife rather than zeal for God. He can win a Bible argument and lose the spirit of Christ. A singer can sing about humility while craving applause. A preacher can preach against pride while loving his own reputation as a bold preacher. A servant can help in church while resenting everyone who failed to notice. A person can give generously while expecting admiration. That is why motive matters. The act may look spiritual while the engine underneath it is strife or vainglory. God sees the engine. “The LORD pondereth the hearts” (Proverbs 21:2).

The first step toward esteeming others better is refusing to let the old man use spiritual activity for self-exaltation. That means the believer must ask hard questions. Am I correcting this person because I love truth and care for his soul, or because I want to win? Am I serving because Christ is worthy, or because I want recognition? Am I posting truth to help people, or to be admired as bold and wise? Am I preaching Christ, or preaching myself through Christ's vocabulary? Paul said, "For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake" (2 Corinthians 4:5). That is the spirit. Christ the Lord. Ourselves servants. Strife and vainglory reverse that order.

Chapter 2: Lowliness Of Mind Is Not Weakness

Paul's alternative is "lowliness of mind" (Philippians 2:3). The world hears that and thinks weakness. The flesh hears that and thinks humiliation. The self-esteem preacher hears that and thinks unhealthy thinking. But the Bible calls it the mind of Christ. Lowliness of mind is not weakness. It is strength under God. It is the mental posture of a believer who understands that God is God, self is not, grace is undeserved, and others are not merely tools for personal advancement. A lowly mind does not need to dominate every room, win every exchange, advertise every sacrifice, correct every slight, and secure every ounce of credit. It is free from the exhausting prison of self-importance.

Lowliness of mind does not mean a believer pretends he has no gifts. Paul knew he was an apostle. He knew God had given him revelation. He knew he labored abundantly. But he said, "yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me" (1 Corinthians 15:10). That is lowliness. It is not denying what God has done. It is refusing to steal the glory for it. A man can know God has used him and still not worship himself. A woman can know God has given her ability and still not parade it. A believer can serve confidently without becoming self-centered because confidence rests in the Lord, not in the flesh. "Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God" (2 Corinthians 3:5).

Lowliness of mind is also not cowardice. Moses was meek, but he stood before Pharaoh. Paul was humble, but he withstood Peter to the face. The Lord Jesus was meek and lowly in heart, yet He rebuked Pharisees, cleansed the temple, and spoke with authority. Humility is not being spineless. It is being submitted to God. The proud man insists on his own will. The humble man yields to God's will. The proud man must defend his image. The humble man can let God judge. The proud man uses strength to serve self. The humble man uses strength to serve others. That is not weakness. That is power under divine government.

Chapter 3: Esteeming Others Better

Paul says, “let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). That is not natural. The flesh automatically esteems self better. It assumes its own needs are more urgent, its own opinions are more insightful, its own wounds are more important, its own time is more valuable, its own burdens are heavier, and its own story is more central. The Bible commands the opposite. Esteem others better. That means the believer deliberately chooses to place others before self in attitude, service, patience, mercy, and consideration. It does not mean pretending every person is morally or doctrinally superior. It means refusing the self-exalting posture that places me at the center of every calculation.

This command is not sentimentality. It has teeth. In marriage, esteeming others better means a husband does not treat his wife as an accessory to his ego, and a wife does not treat her husband as a tool for her comfort. In church life, it means saints stop acting like consumers and start caring for the body. In ministry, it means the preacher is not the star, the singer is not the attraction, and the servant is not working for applause. In correction, it means rebuke is given for restoration, not domination. In daily relationships, it means listening, bearing, forgiving, yielding where possible, and refusing to make every inconvenience a personal insult. “Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another” (Romans 12:10).

This kind of life is impossible while self is enthroned. The self-centered man cannot prefer others because every situation is filtered through his own importance. If he is not noticed, he is offended. If he is corrected, he is attacked. If he is inconvenienced, he is mistreated. If someone else is blessed, he is overlooked. If someone else is praised, he is diminished. That is misery. Self-love promises freedom and produces bondage. Esteeming others better breaks that bondage because it frees the believer from having to be the main character in every room. Christ becomes enough. Service becomes joy. Others become souls to love, not competitors to outshine.

Chapter 4: Look Not Every Man On His Own Things

Paul continues, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others” (Philippians 2:4). Notice he does not say a man may never look on his own things. Responsibilities exist. A man must provide for his household. He must examine himself. He must be faithful in his duties. The word “also” matters. The problem is not proper attention to responsibility. The problem is exclusive self-concern. The selfish man only sees his own things. His burdens, his schedule, his needs, his feelings, his wounds, his desires, his plans, his convenience. Paul commands the believer to lift his eyes and see others.

This is needed in the home. A self-centered husband sees only his labor, his stress, his needs, and his authority. A self-centered wife sees only her burdens, her emotions, her disappointments, and her sacrifices. Self-love turns marriage into a courtroom where both parties present evidence that they are the more neglected party. The mind of Christ turns marriage into service. “Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God” (Ephesians 5:21). That does not erase roles. It places the whole relationship under the fear of God. A Christ-minded husband considers his wife. A Christ-minded wife considers her husband. Both stop using the other as a mirror for self-pity and start asking how to glorify God in the relationship.

This is needed in church life too. A self-centered church member asks, “Who noticed me? Who greeted me? Who served me? Who met my needs? Who failed me?” A Christ-minded church member asks, “Who can I encourage? Who is weak? Who needs prayer? Who is drifting? Who can I help? Who needs a word in due season?” The Bible says, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2). A church full of self-watchers becomes fragile and offended. A church full of burden-bearers becomes strong. Looking on the things of others is not optional decoration. It is part of the mind of Christ lived out among the saints.

Chapter 5: Let This Mind Be In You

Paul gives the source of this humility: “Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:5). The mind of Christ is not merely an attitude adjustment. It is a spiritual pattern. The believer is not told to invent humility from fallen nature. He is told to receive and follow the mind displayed in the Lord Jesus. This means the Christian life is not governed by the mind of the age, the mind of the flesh, the mind of the influencer, the mind of the celebrity pastor, the mind of the wounded self, or the mind of personal ambition. It is governed by the mind of Christ.

The mind of Christ is the opposite of the mind of Lucifer. Lucifer said, “I will ascend” and “I will exalt my throne” (Isaiah 14:13). Christ humbled Himself. Lucifer reached upward for a throne. Christ came downward to a cross. Lucifer wanted to be like the most High. Christ, being in the form of God, took upon Him the form of a servant. That contrast is the whole issue in this series. The religion of self is Luciferian in spirit because it always reaches upward for self. The mind of Christ moves downward in obedience to the Father. If a professing Christian life is always about self rising, self being seen, self being affirmed, self being obeyed, and self being enthroned, it does not smell like Philippians 2. It smells like Isaiah 14.

The phrase “let this mind be in you” means the believer has responsibility. He must not excuse a selfish mind as personality. He must not excuse pride as temperament. He must not excuse vainglory as ministry passion. He must not excuse self-pity as sensitivity. He must let the mind of Christ govern him. That means Scripture must correct the thought life. The Holy Ghost must expose motives. The cross must judge ambition. The believer must learn to ask, “Is this the mind of Christ, or is this the mind of self?” Not every religious thought is spiritual. Not every intense feeling is holy. Not every desire to serve is free from ego. The mind of Christ must rule.

Chapter 6: He Made Himself Of No Reputation

The Bible says Christ “made himself of no reputation” (Philippians 2:7). There may not be a more hated phrase in the modern religious world. Everything now is reputation. Build your reputation. Protect your reputation. Manage your image. Expand your platform. Brand your ministry. Control the narrative. Curate the perception. Present the right version of yourself. Even churches can become reputation machines, carefully shaping how they are seen while claiming to exalt Christ. But the Lord Jesus Christ made Himself of no reputation. The One who deserved all glory did not come down here acting like He needed men to recognize Him.

That does not mean Christ ceased to be who He was. He was still God manifest in the flesh. He was still holy, righteous, true, and full of grace. But He did not grasp at public image. He took “the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7). That is the opposite of self-love. Self-love wants the form of a master. Christ took the form of a servant. Self-love wants to be served. Christ served. Self-love wants to be admired. Christ humbled Himself. Self-love wants to preserve life. Christ became obedient unto death. Self-love wants a crown without a cross. Christ went to the cross and received exaltation from the Father.

This rebukes every area of Christian life. In ministry, make yourself of no reputation. In marriage, make yourself of no reputation. In service, make yourself of no reputation. In worship, make yourself of no reputation. In online speech, make yourself of no reputation. That does not mean neglecting testimony or acting foolishly with your name. It means stop worshipping your image. Stop making every decision around how you look. Stop treating correction as destruction because it damages the image. Stop needing everyone to know how spiritual, sacrificial, wounded, bold, deep, or necessary you are. If the Lord of glory made Himself of no reputation, the servant has no business making reputation his god.

Chapter 7: Obedient Unto Death

The descent of Christ in Philippians 2 reaches its deepest point here: “he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). Humility is

proven by obedience. Not by a soft voice. Not by religious phrases. Not by emotional displays. Obedience. The Lord humbled Himself and obeyed the Father all the way to death. The self-love generation wants humility without obedience, spirituality without submission, worship without surrender, and love without commandment-keeping. But Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Love obeys. Humility obeys. The mind of Christ obeys.

This is where esteeming others better becomes practical. It is not just a feeling of warmth toward people. It requires obedience to God in the way we treat them. Forgive when the flesh wants bitterness. Serve when the flesh wants recognition. Listen when the flesh wants to dominate. Yield when the flesh wants to win. Speak truth when the flesh wants approval. Receive correction when the flesh wants self-defense. Honor others when the flesh wants preeminence. This is daily cross work. "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The mind of Christ does not remain in the clouds. It walks into daily decisions.

The Father exalted the Son after the humiliation. "Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him" (Philippians 2:9). That is God's order. Humility before exaltation. Service before glory. Cross before crown. The flesh wants the crown now. It wants recognition now. It wants vindication now. It wants the upper seat now. But the Bible says, "Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up" (James 4:10). The believer does not need to lift himself. God can lift him in due time. Until then, the calling is clear: lowliness of mind, esteeming others better, looking on the things of others, and walking in the mind of Christ.

Conclusion

Esteeming others better is the biblical alternative to the religion of self. It is not self-hatred, insecurity, emotional collapse, or pretending to have no value. It is humility under God. It is the mind of Christ ruling the believer. It is the old man denied, the flesh humbled, pride rejected, vainglory exposed, and Christ made central. The world says, "Put yourself first." The Bible says, "in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves" (Philippians 2:3). Those are not compatible systems. One produces self-centered people who cannot be corrected, inconvenienced, overlooked, or asked to serve without applause. The other produces servants.

The Lord Jesus Christ is the pattern. He did not come as a self-promoter, platform builder, reputation manager, or religious celebrity. He made Himself of no reputation. He took the form of a servant. He humbled Himself. He became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. That is the mind believers are commanded to have. Any Christianity that keeps self enthroned while using Jesus' name has missed the mind of Christ. Any ministry that

magnifies man while claiming to serve Christ has missed the mind of Christ. Any worship that turns inward and feeds self has missed the mind of Christ. The mind of Christ moves away from vainglory and toward obedience.

So the believer must come away from the mirror. Stop measuring every relationship by self. Stop measuring every church service by self. Stop measuring every sermon by self. Stop measuring every act of service by whether self was noticed. Look to Christ. Let His mind be in you. Esteem others better. Bear burdens. Serve quietly. Receive correction. Prefer one another in honor. Let Christ increase while self decreases. This is not the way of the world, but it is the way of the Saviour. The last-days crowd loves itself. The Bible believer must learn to love Christ enough to serve others without making self the center.

15 of 15: Lovers Of Their Own Selves - Crucified With Christ

Paul gives the final answer to the whole religion of self in one verse: "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). That is not self-help. That is not self-esteem. That is not self-care language with a Bible verse attached. That is not the old man getting counseling until he feels strong enough to sit on the throne again. That is crucifixion. Paul does not say, "I am improved with Christ." He does not say, "I am affirmed with Christ." He does not say, "I am discovering myself with Christ." He says, "I am crucified with Christ." The Christian life is not self repaired, self polished, self promoted, self branded, self celebrated, and self enthroned with Jesus standing nearby as a religious assistant. It is the old man judged at the cross, the believer reckoning himself dead indeed unto sin, and Christ living through him.

That is why this final essay must gather the whole series together and drive it to the cross. The last-days religion begins with "lovers of their own selves" (2 Timothy 3:2), but the Bible's answer is not to teach the self better manners. The answer is death with Christ and life in Christ. Self-denial, pride, self-centered worship, religious celebrity, love of praise, boasting, self-will, vainglory, being wise in your own eyes, identity obsession, pleasure-love, and failure to esteem others better all have one common root: self is alive and demanding a throne. It wants to be admired, obeyed, protected, satisfied, validated, entertained, and defended. The cross does not negotiate with that old rebel. The cross does not put a crown on him. The cross does not give him a platform and call it ministry. The cross says he is crucified.

This is the point modern Christianity often refuses to face. Much of it wants a Jesus who improves self, but not a cross that kills self. It wants grace to mean no guilt, but not grace

that teaches us to deny ungodliness and worldly lusts. It wants worship that makes self feel loved, but not worship that bows self before a holy God. It wants identity in Christ as an emotional mirror, but not crucifixion with Christ as a doctrinal reality. It wants the benefits of salvation without the daily reckoning of the old man dead. But Paul's Christianity is plain: "yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." That phrase is the funeral bell for the religion of self. Not I. Not my will. Not my glory. Not my feelings as final authority. Not my identity as the center. Not my pleasure as lord. Not my wisdom as the compass. Christ liveth in me.

Chapter 1: The Cross Is The End Of Self Rule

The cross is not merely where Christ died for sins. It is also where the believer learns the sentence God has passed on the old man. Paul says, "Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him" (Romans 6:6). That is knowledge the church desperately needs to recover. "Our old man is crucified with him." Not educated with Him. Not entertained with Him. Not rebranded with Him. Crucified with Him. The old man is not a misunderstood friend who needs more affirmation. He is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts. "That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts" (Ephesians 4:22). God does not call the believer to trust, platform, affirm, or enthrone something He calls corrupt.

Self-rule is the oldest rebellion in the universe. Lucifer said, "I will ascend," "I will exalt my throne," "I will sit," and "I will be like the most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14). The first sin was not a lack of confidence. It was the creature reaching for a throne. Every self-centered life echoes that same rebellion in smaller form. My will. My way. My truth. My glory. My feelings. My body. My identity. My dreams. My throne. The cross answers every "I will" with "I am crucified." It takes the rebellious center out of the Christian life and places Christ where He belongs. "That in all things he might have the preeminence" (Colossians 1:18).

This is why the Lord Jesus said, "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me" (Luke 9:23). The cross is not optional decoration. It is the path of discipleship. Self-denial is not hatred of proper life, duty, health, family, stewardship, or God-given responsibility. It is the refusal to let the old man govern. It is telling self no when self rises against Scripture. It is refusing to let emotion become doctrine, preference become authority, appetite become lord, and reputation become god. The cross ends self-rule. If self is still ruling, the cross is being avoided, no matter how much religious language surrounds the life.

Chapter 2: Yet Not I

The words "yet not I" in Galatians 2:20 are some of the most important words Paul ever wrote. They are short enough for a child to memorize and deep enough to judge an entire

generation. “Nevertheless I live; yet not I.” Paul does not deny that he lives. He still walks, works, preaches, suffers, reasons, writes, loves, prays, and labors. Christianity is not the removal of personality, responsibility, memory, intellect, or service. But Paul denies self as the source, center, ruler, and glory of that life. “Yet not I.” The Christian life continues, but the old center has been displaced.

Modern religion hates “yet not I” because it has built nearly everything around “yet I.” Yet my story. Yet my wounds. Yet my feelings. Yet my platform. Yet my identity. Yet my calling. Yet my gift. Yet my dreams. Yet my purpose. Yet my emotional journey. Yet my experience. Yet my truth. The vocabulary of self has invaded the pulpit, the song service, the testimony, the conference, the counseling room, and the social media post. But Paul says, “yet not I.” The believer may testify, but the testimony points to Christ. He may serve, but service points to Christ. He may preach, but preaching points to Christ. He may suffer, but suffering magnifies Christ. He may live, but Christ is the life.

This phrase is also the cure for religious pride. A man can be proud of being right. Proud of being separated. Proud of being bold. Proud of being doctrinal. Proud of suffering. Proud of being against the world. Proud of being humble. Flesh is so crooked it can boast in the cross while secretly admiring itself for doing so. “Yet not I” must be brought back again and again. If God used me, yet not I. If I understood truth, yet not I. If I stood when others fell, yet not I. If I labored more abundantly, yet not I. Paul said exactly that: “I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me” (1 Corinthians 15:10). There is the safe place. Grace gets the glory, and self stays buried.

Chapter 3: Christ Liveth In Me

Paul does not stop with crucifixion. He says, “but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). The Christian life is not merely negative. It is not simply denying, refusing, resisting, rejecting, and dying. It is Christ living in the believer. The old man is crucified, but the believer is not left empty. Christ is the life. “For to me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). That is not poetry. That is doctrine lived out. Christ is not merely the topic of the Christian life. He is the life of it. He is not a religious accessory to the believer’s personal ambitions. He is the indwelling life by which the believer walks with God.

This matters because some people think the cure for self-love is a grim, joyless, lifeless religion where the believer spends all his time despising himself. That is not Bible Christianity. The Christian life is full of life because Christ lives in the believer. But it is not the old life dressed up. It is new life. “Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature” (2 Corinthians 5:17). The new creature does not exist to make the old man feel better. The new creature exists in Christ. The life is not self-originated. It is not self-defined.

It is not self-glorifying. It is Christ in the believer, working through the believer, conforming the believer, and directing the believer toward God's glory.

"Christ liveth in me" also corrects the false identity religion. The believer does have identity, but that identity is not built around self-expression. It is built around union with Christ. "For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God" (Colossians 3:3). Dead and hidden. That is the opposite of the modern obsession with self-display. The world says, "Make yourself known." The Bible says your life is hid with Christ in God. The world says, "Define yourself." The Bible says Christ is your life. The world says, "Express yourself." The Bible says, "Walk in the Spirit" (Galatians 5:16). Christ living in me is greater than me being admired by the world, validated by the church, or understood by the crowd.

Chapter 4: The Flesh Must Be Reckoned Dead

The believer must reckon what God says to be true. Paul writes, "Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord" (Romans 6:11). Reckon means count it so, consider it true, stand on what God has declared. The believer does not crucify himself to get saved. Christ has done the saving work. But the believer is commanded to reckon himself dead unto sin and alive unto God. That reckoning must be practiced because the flesh will keep trying to act alive, important, offended, hungry, entitled, spiritual, wounded, and in charge.

This reckoning applies to every theme in the series. When pride rises, reckon the old man dead. When self-will stiffens the neck, reckon the old man dead. When the craving for praise appears, reckon the old man dead. When worship turns inward and wants emotional stroking, reckon the old man dead. When the heart says, "Trust me," reckon the old man dead. When identity wants to become a mirror, reckon the old man dead. When pleasure demands priority over obedience, reckon the old man dead. When vainglory wants to be seen, reckon the old man dead. The cross must be applied not only to gross sins but to religious self, polished self, wounded self, gifted self, and doctrinal self.

This is why Paul says, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts" (Galatians 5:24). The flesh has affections and lusts. It does not only lust after obviously wicked things. It can lust after attention, control, recognition, comfort, superiority, pity, influence, validation, and religious importance. The believer must not trust those affections just because they feel sincere. The cross must judge them. The world says, "Honor your desires." The Bible says the flesh is crucified with the affections and lusts. The old man does not get to decide what is holy. The cross and the Book decide.

Chapter 5: Walk In The Spirit

The answer to the flesh is not merely human effort. Paul says, “This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). That is the positive walk that follows the negative reckoning. The believer does not defeat self-love by sheer willpower while self remains the center. He walks in the Spirit. The Spirit of God does not glorify self. Jesus said, “He shall glorify me” (John 16:14). That is one of the easiest tests of spiritual claims. If the thing magnifies self, centers self, excuses self, exalts self, or protects self from truth, it is not the Spirit of God leading. The Holy Ghost glorifies Christ.

Walking in the Spirit will always agree with the written word. The Spirit who inspired Scripture does not contradict Scripture. He does not lead a believer to rebel against the plain words of the Book and then call it peace. He does not lead a man into self-will and call it freedom. He does not lead a church into entertainment worship and call it revival. He does not lead a preacher to preach himself and call it ministry. He does not lead believers to trust their own hearts when the Bible says the heart is deceitful. The Spirit uses truth. Jesus prayed, “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17).

Walking in the Spirit also produces fruit that self-love cannot manufacture. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Galatians 5:22-23). Notice how many of those strike at self. Longsuffering refuses selfish impatience. Gentleness refuses harsh pride. Meekness refuses self-assertion. Temperance refuses appetite rule. Love refuses self-centeredness. The Spirit does not produce a life where self is more admired. He produces a life where Christ is more visible. The Spirit-filled life is not self enlarged. It is Christ manifested through a yielded believer.

Chapter 6: The Cross Restores Worship And Service

When the believer is crucified with Christ in practice, worship is restored. Worship no longer turns inward toward feelings, worth, identity, and emotional appetite. It rises upward to God. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). A crucified believer does not come to worship asking first, “How does this make me feel?” He asks, “Is God glorified? Is Christ exalted? Is truth sung? Is the flesh humbled? Is the cross central?” The old man wants worship to soothe him. The Spirit points worship to the Lord. “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain” (Revelation 5:12). Worthy is the Lamb, not the worshipper.

The cross also restores service. Service is no longer a way to be seen, praised, needed, admired, or affirmed. It becomes service unto the Lord. “And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men” (Colossians 3:23). That verse kills vainglory in service. If it is unto the Lord, hidden labor is still valuable. If it is unto the Lord, lack of

recognition does not destroy the heart. If it is unto the Lord, the believer can serve without turning every sacrifice into a public announcement. The cross frees service from the tyranny of applause. Self needs credit. Christ-centered service needs faithfulness.

The cross restores ministry too. The preacher can stop preaching himself. The singer can stop performing self. The teacher can stop displaying self. The debater can stop using truth to feed self. The church can stop structuring everything around personalities and brands. Paul said, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5). That is ministry after the cross. Christ the Lord, ourselves servants. When that order is restored, the church becomes healthier. When it is reversed, religious self takes over even if the Bible is open.

Chapter 7: The Final Answer Is Christ Not Self Improved

The final answer to the series is not better self-esteem. The Bible never diagnoses the last-days problem as men not loving themselves enough. It says they are “lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2). The answer is not better branding, better self-talk, better emotional language, or better religious affirmation. The answer is not turning the old man into a more confident church member. The answer is not helping self feel important while keeping Christ nearby. The answer is crucified with Christ. “I am crucified with Christ” (Galatians 2:20). That sentence is the graveyard of every self-centered gospel.

The final answer is also not self-hatred. Bible truth must be held straight. The believer is not called to despise God’s creation, neglect duties, destroy proper stewardship, or pretend that grace has done nothing in him. He is called to refuse the lordship of the old man and live by the life of Christ. “Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me” (Galatians 2:20). That is not despair. That is liberty. The believer is freed from the exhausting slavery of self. He no longer has to be the center. He no longer has to protect the throne. He no longer has to interpret everything by ego. He can live unto God because Christ lives in him.

This is the only conclusion that can answer the whole series. Self-denial finds its ground in the cross. Pride dies at the cross. Self-will bows at the cross. Vainglory loses its reward at the cross. Pleasure is put back in its place by the cross. Identity is relocated in Christ through the cross. Worship is purified by the cross. Service is humbled by the cross. The self-centered church is corrected when Christ crucified and risen becomes preeminent again. The believer does not need “me improved.” He needs “yet not I, but Christ.” That is the end of the matter. Christ must live where self once ruled.

Conclusion

This series began with Paul’s last-days warning: “For men shall be lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2). We have watched that love of self spread into pride, boasting, self-

will, vainglory, praise addiction, inward worship, self-centered churches, identity obsession, pleasure-love, and the refusal to esteem others better. The diagnosis is plain. The age is not suffering because it failed to love itself enough. It is rotting because man loves himself against God. He loves his own will, his own way, his own truth, his own glory, his own feelings, his own pleasure, and his own throne. That spirit can look worldly, but it can also look religious. It can hold a Bible, sing a song, preach a sermon, run a ministry, and say “to God be the glory” while self remains the hidden god.

The final answer is Galatians 2:20. “I am crucified with Christ.” The old man has been judged. “Nevertheless I live.” The believer has real life. “Yet not I.” Self is no longer the center. “But Christ liveth in me.” Christ is the life, power, glory, and source. “And the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.” The believer still walks in this body, but he lives by faith, not by flesh. “Who loved me, and gave himself for me.” The whole life rests on the love and sacrifice of the Son of God, not on self-love. That verse is enough to burn down the whole religion of self and build the Christian life where it belongs, on Christ crucified and risen.

So let the world keep preaching self-love. Let the motivational pulpits keep preaching self-worth. Let the worship industry keep singing to the mirror. Let the celebrity pastors keep building brands. Let the pleasure-driven churches keep offering crowns without crosses. Let the identity religion keep demanding affirmation. The Bible believer has a better message and a better life. Not self repaired. Not self enthroned. Not self discovered. Not self celebrated. Crucified with Christ. Alive unto God. Walking in the Spirit. Christ living in me. The world says, “Love yourself.” The Lord says, “Deny yourself.” Paul says, “Yet not I, but Christ.” That is the final answer to the lovers of their own selves.

Conclusion to the Series: Lovers Of Their Own Selves

After walking through these fifteen lessons, the matter is no longer vague. The Bible has exposed the disease, traced the root, identified the symptoms, uncovered the disguises, and given the remedy. Paul said, “For men shall be lovers of their own selves” (2 Timothy 3:2), and that one phrase has proven to be a master key for understanding the age we are living in. This is not merely a lost-world problem, though the lost world is full of it. This is not merely a cultural trend, though the culture preaches it constantly. This is not merely a psychological category, though modern language has found a thousand soft ways to rename it. This is a spiritual issue. It is a prophetic mark. It is a last-days condition. It is

man in love with himself, and once self becomes the center, every other part of life begins to bend around that idol.

We have seen that self-love does not remain private. It grows. It talks. It boasts. It swells. It resists correction. It craves praise. It turns worship inward. It builds churches around personalities. It twists the gospel into emotional self-affirmation. It makes men wise in their own eyes. It turns identity into a shrine. It turns pleasure into a lord. It turns ministry into performance. It turns service into a stage. It turns suffering into a badge. It turns feelings into doctrine and personal preference into a counterfeit Holy Ghost. That is why this subject matters. Self-love is not a small leak in the roof. It is rot in the foundation. If it is not judged by Scripture, it will eventually corrupt the home, the church, the pulpit, the song service, the prayer closet, the marriage, the ministry, and the heart.

The world says the answer is more self-love. The Bible says the problem is already self-love. The world says, "Trust yourself." The Bible says, "Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). The world says, "Follow your heart." The Bible says, "He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool" (Proverbs 28:26). The world says, "Speak your truth." The Lord Jesus said, "thy word is truth" (John 17:17). The world says, "Find yourself." Paul said, "I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Galatians 2:20). Those systems cannot be joined. One enthrones self. The other crucifies self and exalts Christ.

That is what we uncovered in this series. The first lesson showed that self-love is the opening mark of perilous times. The second showed that modern Christianity has forgotten the Lord's command to deny self, take up the cross daily, and follow Him. The third traced the throne of self back to Lucifer's "I will" rebellion. The fourth exposed the gospel of self that turns the cross into a mirror instead of preaching Christ's death, burial, and resurrection for guilty sinners. The fifth showed how worship turns inward when the singer becomes the subject. The sixth exposed the self-centered church that claims Christ verbally while revolving practically around man. The seventh uncovered the love of praise, where men would rather be applauded by earth than approved by God.

Then the series went deeper. The eighth lesson dealt with boasters and proud, showing that self-love has a mouth and a swollen heart. The ninth confronted the selfwilled spirit that refuses correction, government, oversight, counsel, and Scripture whenever those things cross personal desire. The tenth exposed vainglory, the empty crown of religious performance. The eleventh warned against being wise in our own eyes, where feelings, wounds, opinions, and preferences become fake authority. The twelfth dealt with the religion of identity, showing that biblical identity in Christ is not self-worship with Christian vocabulary, but union with Christ through death and life. The thirteenth exposed the love of

pleasure, where comfort becomes doctrine and appetite becomes lord. The fourteenth gave the biblical alternative: esteeming others better through the mind of Christ. The fifteenth brought the whole matter to its doctrinal conclusion: crucified with Christ.

So what does this mean for a Bible believer now? It means we do not get to treat self-love as a harmless cultural habit. We have to judge it in ourselves first. It is easy to point at the world, the megachurches, the celebrity pastors, the worship industry, the influencers, the self-help preachers, and the soft pulpits. They deserve to be judged by the Book. But the Bible believer also has to let the Book search his own heart. “Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts” (Psalm 139:23). The old man is not less dangerous because he knows doctrine. Flesh is not safer because it uses the King James Bible. Pride is not holy because it is right about certain things. Self can boast in truth, perform in ministry, crave applause in service, and become selfwilled while claiming to stand for God. That is why the cross must stay personal.

This knowledge should make us more watchful. When a sermon flatters the flesh more than it exalts Christ, we should recognize the spirit behind it. When a song keeps circling around the worshipper instead of rising to God in spirit and in truth, we should test it. When a church becomes a personality machine instead of a body under the Headship of Christ, we should see the danger. When a preacher becomes the brand, we should remember that Christ is to have the preeminence. When we feel the hunger to be seen, praised, quoted, defended, or admired, we should drag that thing to the cross before it grows roots. When feelings begin to act like doctrine, we should put them under Scripture. When pleasure begins to outrank obedience, we should call it what it is. When identity language starts making self larger and Christ smaller, we should return to Galatians 2:20.

This knowledge should also make us more serious about worship. Worship is not a religious therapy room where self is soothed in Jesus’ name. True worship belongs to God. “God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24). That means the words matter. The direction matters. The doctrine matters. The spirit matters. Worship should exalt the Lord, magnify the cross, honor the blood, teach truth, humble flesh, and turn the heart upward. If worship becomes a mirror, it has been corrupted. If Christ becomes background music for self’s emotional experience, the direction is wrong. The Bible believer should not be afraid to ask whether the song, the sermon, the service, and the ministry are truly God-centered or merely self-centered with religious language.

This knowledge should make us more careful with ministry and platforms. A platform is not evil if it is used to point men to Christ and truth. Paul preached publicly. The apostles used every lawful opening to spread the word. But a platform becomes dangerous when attention becomes food for the old man. The question must always be asked: Am I using

this to point to Christ, or am I using Christ to point to myself? Paul said, “For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus’ sake” (2 Corinthians 4:5). That verse is the guardrail. Christ the Lord. Ourselves servants. When that order is reversed, self has taken over the ministry even if the message still sounds religious.

This knowledge should make us more humble in relationships. The Bible does not simply tell us what to reject. It tells us what to put on. “In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves” (Philippians 2:3). That has to come into marriage, family, church life, friendships, correction, service, and daily conduct. The cure for self-love is not merely attacking self-love in others. The cure is receiving the mind of Christ. The Lord Jesus “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant” (Philippians 2:7). If the Lord of glory took the form of a servant, then saved sinners have no business fighting for the throne in every conversation, relationship, church setting, or disagreement.

This knowledge should make us less impressed with religious celebrity. The Bible believer should not be dazzled by crowds, lights, branding, cameras, book deals, followers, platforms, music quality, emotional atmosphere, or polished speech. Those things may impress men, but they do not prove Christ is preeminent. The question is always the Book. Is the gospel clear? Is sin named? Is the blood preached? Is Christ exalted? Is Scripture authoritative? Is holiness upheld? Is the old man denied? Is correction allowed? Is the congregation being trained to follow Christ or admire man? The self-centered church may look successful, but Laodicea looked successful too, and the Lord said it was “wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked” (Revelation 3:17).

Most of all, this knowledge should drive us back to the cross. The remedy was never better self-esteem. The remedy was never better religious branding. The remedy was never a smoother vocabulary for flesh. The remedy is not self repaired and enthroned again. The remedy is crucified with Christ. “Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him” (Romans 6:6). “Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord” (Romans 6:11). That reckoning must become daily. When pride speaks, reckon the old man dead. When self-will hardens, reckon the old man dead. When pleasure demands priority, reckon the old man dead. When praise becomes addictive, reckon the old man dead. When identity turns into a shrine, reckon the old man dead. When worship turns inward, reckon the old man dead.

And then walk in the Spirit. This is not a call to dead religion. It is a call to real life. “Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh” (Galatians 5:16). The Christian life is not just saying no to self. It is saying yes to Christ. It is not just death to the old man. It is life in the Son of God. It is not miserable self-hatred. It is Christ living in the believer. “For to me to live is Christ” (Philippians 1:21). That is the better life. The world’s self-love is bondage

because self is a cruel master. Christ is liberty because His yoke is easy and His burden is light. Self demands constant attention. Christ gives rest. Self must be defended. Christ is our life. Self must be praised. Christ is worthy.

So what do we do with this knowledge now? We test ourselves by the Scriptures. We repent where self has ruled. We stop baptizing flesh with spiritual language. We examine our worship, our motives, our service, our doctrine, our online presence, our church loyalties, our appetites, our reactions to correction, and our hunger for praise. We teach our children that the world's message of self-love is not the gospel. We warn professing Christians that the last-days church can be full of religion while being full of self. We preach Christ, not ourselves. We keep the cross central. We let the King James Bible judge the heart. We refuse the mirror gospel. We restore the preeminence of the Lord Jesus Christ.

This series closes where the Christian life must continually return: "yet not I, but Christ." That phrase is not a slogan. It is the answer. Not my will, but Thine. Not my glory, but His. Not my feelings as final authority, but His word. Not my identity as the center, but my life hid with Christ in God. Not my pleasure as lord, but the love of God ruling the heart. Not my platform, but His gospel. Not my name, but His name. The world is full of lovers of their own selves, and sadly, much professing Christianity has followed the same road with a Bible tucked under its arm. But the Bible believer must take another road. The road is narrow. The road has a cross on it. The road dethrones self and magnifies Christ.

The final word is simple. The world says, "Love yourself." The modern religious world says, "Discover yourself." The influencer says, "Brand yourself." The therapist culture says, "Affirm yourself." The pleasure-driven church says, "Please yourself." The Lord Jesus Christ says, "deny himself." Paul says, "I am crucified with Christ." The Holy Ghost says Christ must have the preeminence. That is what we do with this knowledge. We believe the Book, judge the flesh, reject the self-love gospel, walk in the Spirit, serve others in lowliness of mind, and give the Lord Jesus Christ the place He deserves. Not self on the throne. Not self in the pulpit. Not self in the song. Not self in the gospel. Christ. Always Christ. "Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."



LOVERS OF THEIR OWN SELVES

A 15-PART BIBLE STUDY SERIES

EXPOSING THE ROOT • IDENTIFYING THE SYMPTOMS • PROCLAIMING THE REMEDY



THE WARNING

"For men shall be lovers of their own selves..."
2 Timothy 3:2

THE PROBLEM

Self on the throne corrupts worship, ministry, relationships, doctrine, identity, pleasure, and the church.

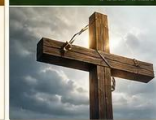
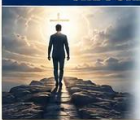
THE REMEDY

Deny self. Take up the cross. Esteem others better. Christ live in you.
Galatians 2:20

THE GOAL

"Yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."
Galatians 2:20

#	THE LESSON	FOCUS	KEY SCRIPTURE (KJV)	WHAT WE UNCOVER	THE DANGER	THE BIBLICAL ANSWER
1	The Last Days Religion of Self When Self Becomes the Center	Self-love is the opening mark of the last days.	"For men shall be lovers of their own selves..." 2 Tim 3:2	Self-love is the fountain of last-days corruption.	Everything revolves around self.	Put Christ on the throne of heart and life.
2	We Forgot to Deny Ourselves The Lost Command of Discipleship	Discipleship means dying daily to self.	"If any man will come after me, let him deny himself..." Luke 9:23	Denial of self is the entrance to discipleship.	You can't follow Christ living for yourself.	Deny self. Take up the cross. Follow the Lord.
3	Lucifer's "I Will" Rebellion The Origin of Self-Throning	Self-exaltation began in heaven with Lucifer.	"I will... I will be like the most High." Isa 14:14	Lucifer's pride is the blueprint of self-love.	Pride before the fall. Same spirit, new name.	Bow to the King of kings. Reject pride.
4	The Gospel of Self When the Cross Becomes a Mirror	The cross is used to promote self, not Christ.	"But we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord." 2 Cor 4:5	Man-centered religion instead of the gospel.	Christ is preached, but self is promoted.	Preach Christ crucified. Not self.
5	Worship of Self Songs That Look in the Mirror	Worship becomes self-focused emotion.	"Worship him in spirit and in truth." John 4:24	Songs and services that focus on "me."	God is background. Self is the audience.	Worship God in spirit and in truth.
6	The Self-Centered Church When Christ is Claimed, But Man is Exalted	Churches built around man, not the Head.	"That in all things he might have the preeminence." Col 1:18	Personalities, platforms, and brands in the church.	Christ is claimed, man is exalted.	Exalt Christ, the Head of the body.
7	Lovers of Praise We Love Applause More Than Approval	The addiction to being seen, liked, praised.	"They loved the praise of men more than the praise of God." John 12:43	The hunger for applause and human validation.	We become slaves of human approval.	Seek the praise that cometh from God.
8	Boasters and Proud The Mouth That Magnifies Self	Pride speaks. Self brags. Flesh swells.	"For men shall be... boasters, proud..." 2 Tim 3:2	Self-promotion replaces humility and modesty.	Pride blinds, divides, and destroys.	Clothe yourself with humility.
9	Self-Willed When My Will Trumps God's Will	Rebellion against correction & authority.	"Presumptuous are they, selfwilled." 2 Peter 2:10	My desires, my plans, my way.	Resists God's will, counsel, & correction.	Submit to God's will and His word.
10	Vainglory Religious Crowns for an Empty Head	Serving for show, not for Christ.	"Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory." Phil 2:3	Performing for crowns that fade.	Empty religion, no eternal reward.	Do all for the glory of God, not self.
11	Wise in Their Own Eyes Feelings, Wounds, & Human Wisdom	Man's wisdom replaces God's truth.	"Be not wise in thine own eyes." Prov 3:7	Feelings, opinions, and wounds as authority.	Leads to error, pride, and deception.	Trust God's word, not human wisdom.
12	The Religion of Identity When Self Becomes Your Shrine	Identity built on self, not on Christ.	"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I..." Gal 2:20	Identity becomes a religion of self.	Self-obsession dressed in Christian words.	Your identity is in Christ alone.
13	The Love of Pleasure When Comfort Becomes Your God	Pleasure outranks God and holiness.	"Lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God." 2 Tim 3:4	Comfort, ease, and indulgence as lord.	Holiness is despised. Sin is entertained.	Love God more than comfort and pleasure.
14	Esteeming Others Better The Mind of Christ in Action	The biblical cure for selfishness.	"In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better..." Phil 2:3	The mind of Christ in humility and service.	Selfishness destroys unity and love.	Esteem others better. Serve in lowliness.
15	Crucified With Christ The Final Answer to Self-Love	The old man is dead. Christ lives.	"Nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me." Gal 2:20	Death to self. Life in Christ alone.	Self reigns unless crucified daily.	Reckon the old man dead. Christ lives in you.

THE ROOT	THE RESULT	THE REMEDY	THE PURPOSE	THE DESTINY
 Self-love is the root of pride, rebellion, self-will, vainglory, pleasure, and every work of the flesh. Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things..."	 A life that revolves around self will never honor God, build others, or finish well. Proverbs 16:18 "Pride goeth before destruction..."	 The cross is not an option. It is the only cure. Luke 9:23 "Deny yourself, and take up your cross daily, and follow me."	 That Christ may live through you and be seen in your life. Philippians 1:21 "For to me to live is Christ."	 Those who deny self shall reign with Christ. 2 Timothy 2:12 "If we suffer, we shall also reign with him..."



VERSEQUEST MINISTRIES

NOT SELF ENTHRONED. NOT SELF EXPRESSED. NOT SELF PROMOTED.

BUT CHRIST.

