

# THE PROBLEM OF SELFISM

**TEXT: I COR. 2:14—3:4**

## **Introduction:**

1. My message this morning is entitled, “The Problem of Selfism.” Before I start, allow me to explain what I mean by “selfism.”
2. Selfism is also referred to as self-love and self-esteem. Selfism is simply the philosophy that promotes self and selfishness.
3. The apostle Paul said in II Timothy 3:1 and 2, “This I know, also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves...”
4. All of this self-worship will eventually culminate in the worship of the coming antichrist. The world is presently being prepared for that.
5. Therefore, selfism is our # 1 problem today. Just look at all of the popular magazines sold today. One of them is actually called “Self Magazine.” Whenever I see them by the cashier in the supermarket I feel nauseated.
6. How about the popular TV shows? Consider Oprah, who is promoting a sloppy mish-mash of selfism and new age gobbledygook.
7. If you go on the Internet you will see a video from Oprah’s TV show where she criticizes people who believe that Jesus Christ is the only way to heaven (cf. John 14:6). Her views are totally unscriptural.
8. In addition to popular TV celebrities, some of the other notable proponents of selfism are psychologists and psychoanalysts, liberals and humanists, philosophers (e.g., Nietzsche) and popular preachers and apostates (e.g., Robert Schuller, Rick Warren, Joel Osteen).
9. The philosopher and author Ayn Rand was a popular selfist. She called it “rational selfishness.” Because Ayn Rand held that faith is contrary to reason, Rand opposed Biblical Christianity.
10. Another notorious selfist was Anton LaVey, the founder of the church of Satan in San Francisco, and the author of the *Satanic Bible*.
11. People who have read his *Satanic Bible* have noted that it was just Ayn Rand’s philosophy, with spooky rituals mixed in.
12. Selfism has been promoted in the public schools. They took away God, prayer, and the Bible and replaced them with self, selfishness, and self-esteem.
13. Consequently students today have a very high opinion of themselves. They may be as dumb as a bag of rocks but they think they are geniuses.
14. A study popularized by Charles Krauthammer, writing in *Time* magazine, investigated the self-concepts of 13-year-olds in Britain, Canada, Ireland, Korea, Spain, and the United States. Each was given a standardized math test. In addition, they were asked to rate the statement: “I am good at mathematics.” The Americans judged their abilities the most highly (68 percent agreed with

the statement!). On the actual math test however, the Americans came last. Krauthammer concludes: “American students may not know their math, but they have evidently absorbed the lessons of the newly fashionable self-esteem curriculum wherein kids are taught to feel good about themselves.”

15. Researchers at Case Western Reserve University and the University of Virginia conducted a comparison of evidence from a variety of studies concerning individuals involved with aggressive behavior of all kinds: assault, homicide, rape, domestic violence, juvenile delinquency, terrorism, prejudice, oppression, and genocide. In some studies, self-esteem was specifically measured; in others it was inferred. The authors concluded that “aggressive, violent, and hostile people consistently express favorable views of themselves.”
16. I could cite many other studies, but that will not be necessary. The #1 problem with selfism is that it is contrary to the Bible.
17. Philippians 2:4 says, “Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.”
18. Romans 12:3 says, “For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.”
19. When General Booth was an old man, he became an invalid. His eyesight failed him, and one year he was in such bad health that he was unable to attend a big Salvation Army Convention in London, England.
20. Somebody suggested that General Booth send a telegram or a message to be read at the opening of the convention. General Booth agreed to do so.
21. When the thousands of delegates met, the moderator announced that General Booth would not be able to be present because of failing health and eyesight.
22. People were disappointed but happy when the moderator announced that General Booth had sent a message to be read with the opening of the first session. He opened the message and began to read the following: “Dear Delegates of the Salvation Army Convention:  
OTHERS! Signed, General Booth.”
23. Remember the acronym JOY: Jesus, Others, You. (You come last.)

## **I. SELFISM IS SPIRITUAL DARKNESS (I COR. 2:14-3:4; II COR. 4:3, 4).**

1. The “natural man” (I Cor. 2:14) is the unregenerate man. The great preacher, FB Meyer, compared man to the OT temple. The temple had an outer court, the holy place, and the Holy of holies.
2. The outer court corresponds to our body, the holy place to our soul, and the Holy of holies to our spirit.
3. Meyer said, “In the regenerate man the most holy place is tenanted by the Spirit of God, but in the unregenerate man it is untenanted and dark, waiting

for its occupant. The natural man is the man whose spirit is empty of God” (*The Christ-Life for Your Life*).

4. The natural man is in spiritual darkness and cannot appreciate or comprehend the things of God (I Cor. 2:14).
5. But the spiritual man “judgeth (or “discerneth”) all things (2:15, 16).
6. The spiritual man does not walk in darkness. Our Lord said in John 8:12, “He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.”
7. But we find a third man here in our text. He is not unregenerate, like the natural man. But he is not spiritual either. He is carnal (3:1-4). Paul addresses these carnal men as “brethren” (3:1).
8. He is not in spiritual darkness, but his light does not shine brightly. You might say he is a bit “shady.”
9. Oftentimes people wonder if the carnal believer is saved or lost. He is hard to figure out. He is neither hot or cold, but lukewarm.
10. He is saved so he gets little enjoyment from sin, but since he is worldly and selfish he gets little enjoyment from the things of God.
11. He likes his money and the things money can buy. He knows a little Bible, but he does not consistently obey the Bible. The Bible calls him the “carnal (fleshly) man” (I Cor. 3:1-4).
12. The carnal man might come out to a revival meeting but he does not really want to be revived. In fact, carnal church members hinder revival.
13. The carnal man is like a little baby spiritually even though he has been saved for quite some time. He cannot digest strong meat, only milk (I Cor. 3:1, 2).
14. Babies are cute and wonderful but we expect them to grow up and get off the milk bottle. But some Christians never grow up. There are some people around here who should be in leadership positions but we cannot count on you because you are just too carnal.
15. Carnal Christians allow themselves to be controlled by the old nature (“the flesh”). The apostle Paul wrote in Romans 7:18, “For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing.”
16. Again I will quote FB Meyers. He said, “Spell ‘flesh’ backwards, drop the *h*, as we are apt to do in London, and you get s-e-l-f; ‘flesh’ is ‘self,’ and ‘self’ is ‘flesh.’”

## **II. SELFISM HINDERS SPIRITUAL GROWTH**

1. Selfism is nothing but carnality. The Scofield Bible (under I Cor. 3:1) says, “A carnal state prevents spiritual growth.”

2. Little babies cannot digest meat. They can only drink milk. In like manner, carnal Christians cannot accept strong preaching and Bible teaching. They chafe at it (3:2; cf. Heb. 5:11-14).
3. Hebrews 5:14 says carnal believers have not learned “to discern both good and evil.” FB Meyer was on a ship crossing the Atlantic Ocean from America. While on the ship, the pure ocean air made him very keen to discern impurity.
4. When he arrived in England he stayed with some friends. He was bothered by a foul odor but his friends could not smell anything bad.
5. But Meyer was sure something was wrong so he started to investigate. Sure enough, he soon discovered the problem – about a mile away, a sewage-farm had infected the air.
6. FB Meyer wrote, “My friends who had no training on the Atlantic were unable to detect it. So there are men who take up a novel full of impure thought and read it and not feel hurt, though the hurt has been certainly received; men and women who listen to uncharitable talk, and not detect its undertone; men and women who go in and out of the world and mix in its pleasure and sin, and still call themselves Christians, because they cannot discern good and evil.”
7. Instead of being fed all this self-esteem foolishness, children ought to be taught about the deceitfulness of sin, and the fall of man (Genesis 3).
8. Remember what the serpent said to Eve. “Ye shall be as gods” (Gen. 3:5). It’s been that way ever since.
9. Since the fall of man, man has made himself the center of everything. This is the essence of humanism. Humanism is another variation of selfism.
10. Humanism is a religion which deifies man and dethrones God.
11. Humanists teach that man is the measure of all things. Humanism excludes God from reality and makes man the judge of all things.
12. Humanism is the unofficial religion of our public schools and universities, court system, politics, and media. It has even taken over most of the churches.
13. Romans 8:7 and 8 says, “The carnal mind is enmity against God... They that are in the flesh cannot please God” (Rom. 8:8).
14. Unsaved people cannot appreciate the things of God “because they are spiritually discerned” (I Cor. 2:14).
15. But even saved people cannot appreciate the Bible if they are self-obsessed and carnal. They are too immature to handle strong Bible teaching – they are “not able to bear it” (I Cor. 3:2).
16. Our Lord said to His disciples, “I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now” (John 16:12). They needed to be filled with the Holy Spirit. And so do we.

17. Carnal Christians have the ability to learn the Bible but no desire.  
Unfortunately, I have seen Christians like this. You can take them just so far and that's about it. They are selfish and carnal and as long as they are content to remain that way they cannot grow spiritually.
18. The reason so many churches are entertainment-oriented is carnality. The reason so many churches are canceling Sunday evening services and Wednesday evening services and revival meetings is carnality.
19. The reason so many Christians are not interested in missions is carnality.
20. The reason they do not pray is carnality.
21. The reason they do not read their Bibles is carnality.
22. The reason they do not tithe is carnality. Selfish people want to hoard all their money.
23. Remember what Jesus said, "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

### **III. HOW TO GET VICTORY OVER SELFISM**

1. When Christ died on the cross, He not only died to save us from the penalty of sin, He died to save us from the power of sin.
2. Romans 8:3 and 4 says Christ "condemned sin in the flesh, That the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit."
3. Think of those words: "condemned sin in the flesh." That is "self."
4. We often think of the cross in terms of salvation from sin. It is also salvation from self! Galatians 5:24 and 25 says, "And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit."
5. The "old man" (self) has already been crucified. Do you believe it?
6. This is victory over selfism (Gal. 5:16-26).
7. I heard an interesting story about two Irishmen, Pat and Mike. They found a strange looking turtle running around with no head. It had been completely severed from its body. A big argument started with Pat insisting that the turtle was dead, and Mike insisting that the turtle was alive.
8. Finally, a man named O'Brien walked by and they asked him his opinion. O'Brien looked at the turtle and said, "The turtle is dead, but he doesn't believe it!"
9. That's the way many Christians are. They are dead to sin but they just don't believe it.

### **CONCLUSION:**

1. You will recall back in Matthew 16:21, our Lord told His disciples how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day.
2. The next verse says, “Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee” (Matt. 16:22).
3. Then our Lord turned, and said unto Peter, “Get thee behind me, Satan: thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men” (Matt. 16:23).
4. Consider what Jesus said. He said Satan was behind Peter’s statement. And then He added, “Thou art an offence unto me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men”
5. The flesh does not like the cross. Then our Lord said to Peter and the other disciples, “If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow me” (Matt. 16:24).
6. “Let him deny himself.” This means to deny the flesh. This is absolutely necessary.
7. It is not just Christ dying on the cross to save us from hell. It is Christ dying on the cross to deliver us from our selfism.