

It's Not About You

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

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We live in a self-centered age, as you probably know. Of course, sinful human nature which has dogged mankind since the sin of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden is essentially self-centered.

Selfishness has been a persistent hallmark of human thought, speech, and activity from the beginnings of this world.

But, this age before the return of Christ is especially self-absorbed, and self-seeking. In fact, it has been called, essentially, narcissistic; that this is an age of narcissism.

Cultural observers (in America at least) lay the blame for American narcissism squarely at the feet of the baby boomer generation. This is probably quite a broad and general statement, but if you think about it, things in America started turning toward the bottom of the barrel from the Baby Boomer's earliest days.

If you will remember, they began right after World War Two, and their childhoods were the boom-time of the 1950s when Americans started to have such a great deal of money that they spent much of it on their kids, and essentially spoiled them in many ways.

There was sex, drugs, and rock and roll in the 1960s. There was the Viet Nam War, and disco in the 1970s. There was the decade of greed in the 1980s. Then there was their quintessential president, Mr. Bill Clinton, in the 1990s. And now, in the "oughts" as we are going through them, there is the red state, blue state divide in politics. This divide is essentially the two major wings of the baby boomer generation, and they are facing off against each other. There are the boomers who are still liberal, and who want more government control—the blue staters. And then you have the other ones that have, through the years wizened up a bit, who are more conservative, who want less government control—the red staters. It might not be quite this cut and dried, but the boomer generation has been the driving force in culture and politics since at least the 1950s.

And, they have done it, if by nothing else than sheer weight, because they are the most numerous generation ever.

So, they unduly dominate American culture even though two generations have arrived on the scene after them—Gen X'ers (also called Thirteeners), and the Millennial Generation after that who are now coming into adulthood, but do not have nearly the impact on American culture.

So, our culture has been fixated on this particular generation, and they are the ones who came out with such things as Self Magazine, self-help things, self-improvement things, self-this, and self-that. And, I am not saying that all of you who are baby boomers are like this—please do not think that—I am just talking in broad cultural terms. This one generation has produced a

culture that is very self-centered; it is self-absorbed. We call that narcissism.

What is narcissism, though? Let us get a definition of narcissism is. Now, a common dictionary definition of narcissism is, "self-love; an exceptional interest in, and admiration for one's self.." That is a real simple easy one.

But, if we would like a bit more thorough definition, maybe slightly more psychological definition of what it is, we can define it this way: "The pattern of characteristics and behaviors which involve infatuation and obsession with oneself to the exclusion of others; the egotistic and ruthless pursuit of one's gratification, dominance and ambition."

Everything about this narcissistic person is centered on himself. And, there is not one wit of care about anyone else.

So, it is extreme self-centeredness to the point of not caring for anybody else's welfare.

Now, narcissism is not absent from the Bible.

Please turn to II Timothy 3. We will see a scripture in which it is mentioned. Now, the term narcissism is not in the Bible. That term comes from the Greek myth, Narcissus. But, the idea is in the Bible.

II Timothy 3:1-2 But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves,

Now, this word that Paul uses here in predicting narcissism as a central trait in the end-time, "lovers of themselves," as it is translated is the Greek word, "Philautoi." "Phil," meaning love, and "autoi," meaning self; so it is literally self-love, which is the basic definition of narcissism.

Now, if you would like a bit of an expanded understanding of the Greek term, Aristotle used it in his treatise, "Politika." If you want to look it up, it is chapter two, paragraph five. And he writes there that, "Philautoi is not loving oneself, but loving it unduly just as the love of possessions."

So he compares philautoi—narcissism—to extreme materialism.

We all have natural self-interests. But, Paul speaks of affection for and absorption with the self far beyond normal. We are all flesh. We have desires. We have to satisfy (some) desires, and that is fine, as long as we do it within certain bounds.

But, narcissism, or philautoi, goes far beyond that. It is like a greedy man who wants nothing else but money and things, and to spend all his time accumulating. It is very much like materialism.

And it is this philautoi—this narcissism—that is at the head of this list here in II Timothy 3. It actually inspires the rest of the traits that are listed in verses 2 through 5. All those traits of people in the last days spring from this extreme self-centeredness. Otherwise, they would not be doing those things. They would have more out-going concern.

Aristotle defines philautoi as, "an unduly or disproportionate love for self," like materialism, which is an excessive desire to possess and control things. Now, from our spiritual perspective,

this is quite insightful. A narcissist excludes regard, and certainly any affection, for all else. He is trained like a gun, or laser beam on himself. His favorite object in the world is a mirror, because he can then gaze upon himself.

If you might remember the story of Narcissus, someone tried to get Narcissus' attention, and he had found this place near a stream, or pond, where he saw his reflection, and he just could not be drawn away. He was totally fixated upon his own reflection. And that is how a narcissist is. Just as a materialistic person focuses purely on physical things, a narcissist regards only himself.

So, a narcissist, then, from our perspective, looks neither up, nor out, but only in—within himself. Everything is about him. As Psalm 10: 4 says, God is in none of his thoughts. In fact, no one is in any of his thoughts except himself. He is the only one that he thinks about. Even if he desires salvation the quest for it is only for himself. Even his altruism, if he does any, any high thoughts, are only all about him, and what it is going to get him, or bring him.

Now, my fear is that in these narcissistic days, because we are just deluged by it, that we may absorb aspects of this attitude without even being aware of it.

Now, I am especially worried that some among us who are more culturally tuned in, and able to be influenced by the world to a greater degree, might approach salvation from a self-serving narcissistic point of view without even being aware that they are doing so. What I mean is that salvation, and the pursuit of it becomes merely the ultimate in self-satisfaction, and self-reward.

"I want salvation because I want to live forever, and I deserve it." This might be one way of someone putting it in their own mind.

So, my purpose today is to give you an opposite perspective of salvation, to counter the cultural influences of narcissism. Salvation is not about us. We certainly benefit from it, and it is a fine thing, it is a wonderful thing. God offers it freely. But ultimately, and predominately salvation is about God and His Glory.

For instance, you may want to write down Ezekiel 36: 22, which I read in my last sermon. God says, "I am not doing this for you, Israel, I am doing it for my own Name's sake." And, there are scriptures like that throughout the Bible to give us a hint that even though God delivers us, even though God gives us great things, He gives us grace, and He offers us salvation, He wants to give us glory in His kingdom, ultimately and predominately salvation is about God and His Glory.

So, with this outward, God-centered perspective, there is no telling what amount of fruit we can produce to glorify God Himself. And the rest is icing on the cake.

Now let us see an example of a "narcissistic Christian." This is in quotes because this man wanted to be a Christian, for certain of his own reasons, but he never did quite get it. This is the example of Simon Magus. This is an obviously extreme example, but sometimes the most extreme examples are the best.

Acts 8: 9-24 But there was a certain man called Simon, who previously practiced sorcery in the city and astonished the people of Samaria, claiming that he was someone great, to whom they all gave heed, from

the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is the great power of God." And they heeded him because he had astonished them with his sorceries for a long time. But when they believed Philip as he preached the things concerning the kingdom of God and the name of Jesus Christ, both men and women were baptized. Then Simon himself also believed; and when he was baptized he continued with Philip, and was amazed, seeing the miracles and signs which were done. Now when the apostles who were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent Peter and John to them, who, when they had come down, prayed for them that they might receive the Holy Spirit. For as yet He had fallen upon none of them. They had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus. Then they laid hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. And when Simon saw that through the laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Spirit was given, he offered them money, saying, "Give me this power also, that anyone on whom I lay hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "Your money perish with you, because you thought that the gift of God could be purchased with money! You have neither part nor portion in this matter, for your heart is not right in the sight of God. Repent therefore of this your wickedness, and pray God if perhaps the thought of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are poisoned by bitterness and bound by iniquity." Then Simon answered and said, "Pray to the Lord for me, that none of the things which you have spoken may come upon me."

Now, all the way back in verse 9, the character of Simon Magus is presented first and foremost. He practiced sorcery. And this is a huge clue to the man's personality and character. If you stripped down the word sorcery to its most fundamental parts, it is all about personal power, and control over others. Think about it: Why would one want to be a sorcerer? Because that person wants to affect change, and be the one to control that change, to remake his own little world into his own image. So, sorcery is about personal power and control over others.

Now, the Bible also says that he, himself, claimed that he was great. He went out saying, "Look at me! I am a wonderful person! See what I can do?" And the people believed him. And then, on top of that, the people said from the least to the greatest of them (verse 10) that this man is the great power of God. Wow! What that could do to an ego which was already self-centered! They equated him with God's own power! "Look at this wonderful man and the great things he can do!"

And you get this picture of Simon Magus' head growing larger and larger until now he's on the level of God he is so great. He lapped this up I am sure. "Wow! Here comes Simon the Magician. Look at him! He can do so many wonderful things!" This, I am sure, just made his day.

So, they stroked his narcissism until he was absolutely full of himself. He was the big man on campus. He was the great power of God.

But, then he ran into a buzz saw—Philip the Evangelist—who had the word of God, and had been given the power of God. And, he went about doing miracles. And Simon saw this, and believed, it says. How much he believed we do not know. Maybe he thought that the things Philip was preaching were very good things. Maybe he had an intellectual agreement with these things. But, when he saw the miracles through Philip, I think what he saw were two things: He saw a rival encroaching on his greatness; and he saw that his own powers were a sham—they were fake, not real. But, the powers through Philip were real. They were based on the truth of God. And, they came directly from the Father.

Simon's powers were mere trickery, a mere imitation. I would not be surprised if they were demon inspired. Nevertheless, they were an imitation of the real thing.

So, he wanted God's power for himself. He could recognize real power when he saw it, and he saw it in Philip. And he wanted it bad.

He wanted not only the power, but also the fame, and the adulation that such power could bring him.

So, he was very direct about it. He simply asked for it, and offered money. But, Peter saw right through him, immediately. He correctly discerned that Simon's problem originated in his heart. That was one of the first things he said. "Your money perish with you (verse 20)," and in verse 21 he said, "Your heart is not right in the sight of God." It was his attitude, his innermost being; his central character was black, evil; his very thought was wicked, and self-serving. He used terms like that: "Poisoned by bitterness, bound by iniquity...your wickedness." Peter did not mince words. He saw right through Simon and his narcissism.

Peter was telling him that he had not only tripped up and committed this one sin, but that he was evil to the very core. And we know this because of verse 23, "I see that you are poisoned by bitterness, and bound by iniquity."

Remember where Paul says that we were once slaves to sin? Well, with Simon, he was not only a slave to sin, he was shackled and the prisoner of sin. He was captive to it. He was bound by iniquity.

So, he was in bad shape. And the legends all say that he had run-ins with Peter and others around the empire, particularly in Rome. But, it is hard to say. Those are just myths. But, we can see in scripture that he did not repent, because Simon's reply tells us everything that we need to know.

There is no indication in verse 24 that Simon had any sorrow or repentance in him about what he had done. There does not even seem to be awareness that he had done anything wrong. His narcissism was a form of self-righteousness. Remember, he was the great power of God. He was beyond doing wrong because being the great power of God, he could be and do whatever, right? He had set his own righteousness in which he could do no wrong. Of course not, he was the pinnacle of greatness and wonder!

And so what did he say to Peter in reply?

It is just the sorcerer's way of saying, "Please undo the curse, or hex that you just put on me."

He did not say, "I am sorry. I did wrong. I repent. I will not do it again. Please help me to see the error of my ways."

Rather, he said, "Pray to the Lord for me that none of these things which you have spoken may happen to me." He did not want to change. He just wanted the punishment to be removed, so he would not have to suffer. "Not him! Oh, not the great power of God!" It was all about him; all about Simon.

That is enough, now, with the bad guys. Turn to Isaiah 12 to start on the proper path of what our attitude should be. We will read the whole chapter as it is only six verses. This is a hymn and song of praise from Isaiah to God having to do with the millennium when Israel comes back into the land.

Isaiah 12:1-6 And in that day [the time marker] you will say: "O LORD, I will praise You; Though You were angry with me, Your anger is turned away, and You comfort me. Behold, God *is* my salvation, I will trust and not be afraid; For YAH, the LORD, *is* my strength and song; He also has become my salvation." Therefore with joy you will draw water From the wells of salvation. And in that day you will say: "Praise the LORD, call upon His name; Declare His deeds among the peoples, Make mention that His name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, For He has done excellent things; This *is* known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great *is* the Holy One of Israel in your midst!"

Now, these are the words of returning, repentant Israelites once they finally get it. Notice that the main theme stated in verse 2 at the end, "Look! God has become my salvation. God is my salvation. He is everything to me." And, the rest of the Psalm is merely an amplification of this one thing. They finally get it, and it is all about God. And, it is not all about them.

You may have noticed, as we have gone along here, that, except for a few necessary mentions, (in fact, most of them are in sentences in which the subject is some sort of submission to God) the words and pronouns "I," "me," and "my," are pretty much absent from this Psalm. It is not like the Pharisees' prayer in the New Testament with the publican, where the Pharisee is saying, "I have done this, and I have done that, and look how great I am."

It says above that in that day Israel will be turning their attention on God.

The praise, here, is for God Himself—His worthiness, His strength, His honor, His acts of deliverance, His greatness, and His glory. Self-centered Israel by this time has had to endure the terrors of the great tribulation, and they have had to see the destruction and worthlessness of everything that they held dear. And it takes this for them to finally get the point that it is not about them, but about God.

Yet, the plan of God involves the salvation of men, still its ultimate purpose is to satisfy and glorify God Himself.

Now, someone might think, "This seems awfully narcissistic of God in which He set up a plan so

that ultimately He can bring glory to Himself, and just be the Great God of all the universe." No. This is not narcissistic in the least. It only seems narcissistic when you are a human being and do not understand.

What does the Apostle John say that God is? He says that He is love—agape love. Agape love, as Mr. Armstrong always taught us, is complete outgoing concern. If God is going to use His plan of salvation to bring Himself glory for all eternity, there must be a loving, outgoing reason for it.

Now, His desire for us to perceive our salvation in terms of His Glorification is to bring us into unity with His perfect Holy righteous character. Does that sound familiar? He has set up His plan of salvation so that we learn by going through this process to think outwardly—to love as He does.

I do not know if you ever thought of this verse in these terms before, but Jesus said in Matthew 16: 25:

Matthew 16:25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.

When you save your life, who are you focused on? Yourself. But, if you lose your life for another's sake, who are you focused on? That other person. Your own life is not worth as much as that other person's life, and Jesus said that that is a key to salvation—learning to lose your own life for the sake of another person's life, particularly His life.

It is not about us. It is about God.

Now, this Psalm, or song from Isaiah (I am still thinking of what was said there) is divided into two stanzas. And most of your bibles probably show this. Verses 1-3 is one stanza, and verses 4-6 is the second. This was a purposeful arrangement by the composer. We will call the first stanza, "Personal Salvation." And, we will call the second stanza, "Public Responsibility."

Now, remember the circumstances of this are Israel coming back into the land in the millennium, and finally understanding what has gone on, and what God has done for them. And this is how they respond to it. This is their hymn of praise to God for finally opening their eyes to what He has done, and giving them all these things.

In the first stanza, Personal Salvation, we have a condensed summary of the conversion process. God was angry. Why was He angry? Because they had sinned! That is why He gets angry. That makes Him angrier than anything; to see His people doing something that He has told them a thousand times not to do.

Have you ever been angry with your children when they do something again and again, even though you have told them so many times not to do it? And you have punished them, but it just seems like something that they have got to do.

Well, in a way, that is what happened with Israel. God had given them many chances, and given them much instruction. So, what He had done, then, after all this time of not listening, He had gone far off (in their minds). Really, it was their sins that had cut them off from Him. He had not

gone anywhere, but rather they had gone far from Him. But, His anger was appeased through Christ's sacrifice. It says, "your anger is turned away, and you comfort me." He had given them great comfort because they finally begin to understand what was going on. And now that He is close again (from their perspective), He encourages and helps, and gives grace in their time of need.

So now, they have a relationship with God, and they become aware (as you go through verse 2) that God has done everything. He gives us whatever we need to bring us into His family. "God is my salvation. I will trust and not be afraid, for Yah is my Lord and strength, and my song. He also has become my salvation."

Notice that God, Himself, is their salvation. The person is the salvation—God—not the fact they were delivered, but it was God, Himself, that was everything to their salvation. He is the source of the salvation, the author of the salvation; He is the means by which they were saved, He gave them the power and the strength to come to salvation, and He was the finisher of their salvation. The whole process from beginning to end God was salvation.

So, as the Israelites figure out here, all we can do is trust Him, and praise Him in astonishment for what He has done! It was not about us at all. It was about God and all that He had done. We hardly had anything to do with it. We believed. We followed. We trusted. But the vast majority of salvation was God and what He did.

So as we get into verse 3, the ideas here in speaking of water being drawn from the wells of salvation, is, "What great joy we have now! Because, God makes salvation so open and free, and refreshing, and sustaining just like water."

You go get a nice drink of cold water at a fountain, it refreshes us, it sustains us, and it wakes us up. And, that is what God's salvation is to us. This is an example of how we should feel about what God has done for us in giving us salvation, and guiding us through the process.

By the way, just as a side note, it is this verse (Isaiah 12: 3) that was recited during the Water Ceremony that was either on the seventh day of the Feast of Tabernacles, or most likely The Last Great Day. Remember Jesus (in John 7) saying, "Out of my Belly will flow rivers of Living Water." This is what He was referring to. He was talking about the time during the Great White Throne Judgment (as we believe) when the waters of salvation will be freely given to all who want it; a great rushing torrent of water given in superabundance. That is what He wants to do to us. This is available to us now! Talk about power! God has made this available to us; and what joy we should have that that has been opened to us! We have been able to come to the well of salvation and draw water from it.

Now, on to the second stanza which is about public responsibility.

Now that we have become aware of what God has done, now that we have become aware of how critical and overwhelmingly needful we are to salvation, what do we do? What is our response?

Isaiah 12: 4-6 "Praise the LORD, call upon His name [proclaim His name]; Declare His deeds among the peoples, Make mention [cause to

be remembered] that His name is exalted. Sing to the LORD, For He has done excellent things; Let it be known in all the earth. Cry out and shout, O inhabitant of Zion, For great *is* the Holy One of Israel in your midst!"

What is our public responsibility? To praise and glorify God! That is all that it says there in those three verses. Now that we know what God is to us and how great He is, and how necessary He is to us in our salvation, we are called to praise and worship God with all our being.

We deserve so little; but so much has been given to us. And, our response to that is to exalt and glorify God before the world. There should be no hesitation on our part. *"Look at what has been done for me! And, you have the opportunity to have this done for you too. How my life is so much better now! I know what is going on! I know that I have eternal life, and I will be changed at the resurrection! I know that God loves me! I know that He is going to give me everything needful for me to be there with Him! Would you like to share that with me?"*

Now, this public response, or responsibility that we have once we are given or offered salvation, would include things we do all the time, like reciting our personal experiences with God—how we came into the church of God. Or, maybe share circumstances that have come up in our lives, and how we have seen God intervene.

But, it is far broader than that. In fact, the sense is in these last three verses here in Isaiah 12 is that, in everything we do, no matter what it is, or whatever we say or think, we should purposely shower God with honor, praise, and glory for what He is, as well as what He has done! We should be thrilled—filled with joy—to make a grand and eloquent witness for God.

When someone does such a great thing for us, that is the only response that there should be.

Now, this is not just an Old Testament concept. Turn to the book of Colossians. Paul writes to these people:

Colossians 3:1-2 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth.

As I have been saying in my last few sermons, this is looking up, not down.

Colossians 3:3 For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God.

This is a key verse in this section.

Colossians 3:4 When Christ *who is* our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

Look at that hope! Look at the positive way that he stated this!

Colossians 3:5 Therefore [conclusion; what we should do] put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry.

(Now, all of these have to do with sexual sins, lusts of various kinds. And, right off the bat with the word fornication, Paul lets us know that perhaps in Colossae there were problems with sexual sins because all of these things have a tie to that.)

Colossians 3:6-7 Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them.

They had just come out of this world and culture of Colossae where these things were extant. They had done these things, and now needed to guard themselves, and put to death any kind of desire to go back to them.

Colossians 3:8 But now you yourselves are to put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth.

These have to do with the breaking of the sixth commandment, particularly, ways in which they showed their hate and anger toward others. They were abusive.

Colossians 3:9 Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds,...

So, basically three major areas he tells them to work in here: The seventh commandment, the sixth commandment, and the ninth. And he also touches on the tenth.

Colossians 3:10-11 ...and have put on the new *man* who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free, but Christ *is* all and in all.

Now, in verse 11, he came back to what he started with in verse 3. He came back to the theme.

How much is it not about us? It is totally not about us. Well, maybe that is a slight overstatement, but mostly not about us. In fact, the old us is supposed to be dead. The old self-centered, narcissistic person that we were is dead, or had died as Paul says here. And the new man, who now lives, is completely different from that old person as night is from day.

In verse 3, after Paul says that we died, he says, "Our life," the life we live now, "is hidden with Christ in God."

This is one of my favorite scriptures. I have come to this before at the Feast of Tabernacles

because I think that it is so appropriate.

This verse suggests that once converted our lives are to be so completely wrapped up with Christ and His way of life that we, in effect, cease to exist as separate beings. *Our lives are hid with Christ in God*. We are part of His body. We are in Him. And, we should function as if we were one person.

Now, obviously we have a separate existence from Him. We are in the flesh. He is in the spirit. So, we have lives to live here on earth. But as much as can be done with those separate existences, we are to be living as if we were in Christ already, hidden there, and invisible. All that should be seen on the outside (of us) is Christ!

We are there. We are a kidney, or left toe, or cell in a muscle somewhere. But what people should see is Christ. Because He is our Head, he directs our words, actions, and thoughts.

Paul goes on to say that we are awaiting two things while we are hid with Christ in God. The first he gets to right away in verse 4 where he says that we are awaiting our glorification when Christ returns. That is the big thing, the hope of the resurrection when we will be raised with Christ, and changed, and we can finally be with Him forever. And this dichotomy between flesh and spirit is done away, and we then can really be one with Him.

But the second thing that we are engaged in is our sanctification. That is what he gets to in verses 5 through 11. What do we do while we are hid with Christ in God, and we are waiting for the resurrection from the dead? Well, we do two things. We start killing things—that is what he says, "...therefore, put to death..." those things in your members which get you into trouble. We have to kill the bad character traits, put them totally in the grave, stomp on them, and make sure that they never come up again. And while we are at it, we should also be incorporating new Godly character in its place. This is essentially sanctification! Putting out the bad, and putting on the good, until we are really hid with Christ in God, so that people will see us and see Jesus Christ's character in our flesh, because we have put out those bad things, and put on those good things.

Finally, in verse 11, he restates the crux of his point:

Colossians 3:11 ...where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave *nor* free[things which no longer matter], but Christ *is* all and in all [having become everything to us].

So, when we look on one another, who cares if you are of a different race, elderly, a mortician, or have only a grade school education, or whatever you may think is a disadvantage to you, the rest of us should not care about it. All we should be seeing is how much Christ is in you.

What are we called? Christians, right? Christ is all, and in all.

So, when we have this perspective it is not about us, it is about God, it is about Christ. We are in the proper frame of mind to pursue salvation properly. It is not about us. Christ is everything.

And more:

Colossians 3:12-17 Therefore, as *the* elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also *must do*. But above all these things put on love, which is the bond of perfection. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord. And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

You might also want to read I Corinthians 10: 31 which says somewhat of the same thing. But here is simply a list of some of the things we should be doing now that we understand that Christ is everything. And, we are just happy to be hidden in Him. We are so happy we sing songs in our hearts, we sing songs out loud, we are so happy that we understand that Christ is everything that we break into songs about Him.

But did you notice as we went through there that his suggestions of the things that we should put on keep coming back to Christ or God? He says things like, "forgive like Christ forgave," or "have the peace of God," and "let the word of Christ dwell richly in you," and "do everything in the name of the lord Jesus." We keep coming back to this touchstone.

And what is it?

He simply means that since we are in Christ, and He is the head of the body which he mentions in verse 15, we had better be following His lead in everything down to the most minute facet of our lives. Keep going back to Christ and see what He did, and then do likewise.

Colossians 3:17 And *whatever* you do in word or deed, *do* all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him.

This means that everything that we say or do should be done because we have His authority to do it. When you do something in the name of another, you do things under his authority. He has given certain permissions, certain responsibilities, to an ambassador and the ambassador goes out and does things in the name of this particular entity. In our case, it is Jesus Christ.

And so Paul is saying that our every word and action must be guided by His teaching and example. And, that is what gives us authority to do them as well. We can do things in the name of the Lord Jesus if we know from our learning about Him that they are good. We can do them.

What this means, then, when it comes down to it is that our will is no longer relevant. Only Christ's will really matters. Is it becoming clear how little it is about us? If Christ gives us permission to do it, and we follow that will, we should have no problem.

Turn to II Corinthians 5 for a reiteration of the same point. I want to really give it to you in full force. It is not about us.

II Corinthians 5:14-15 For the love of Christ compels us, because we judge thus: that if One died for all, then all died; and He died for all, that those who live should live no longer for themselves, but for Him who died for them and rose again.

Paul says here, as an example to these people, that his actions and decisions in his ministry were compelled or motivated—the word here is constrained—by the love of Christ. Meaning, he did not oversee his church areas in any way that could be construed as self-serving. The example that he would give later is that he would not encroach on anybody's territory; it was not about Paul and amassing a religious empire for himself so that he could be the apostle over an empire of people. No, he did not encroach into Peter's territory, or John's or any of the others. He went where Christ sent him, where the love of Christ saw a need which needed to be filled. So, he followed Christ's example of love. If Christ died for all, then Paul would similarly "die" daily in service to the people.

And so, he makes it more general. Similarly, whoever we are, whatever we do, wherever God has put us, we no longer live for ourselves. We no longer set our own course. Instead, we follow the will of the One who died for us as our Savior, and who rose again as our High Priest, and soon coming King. We are hid with Christ in God.

It is His will that matters, not ours. It is this principle that Paul clung to, which he restates in Philippians 1:21, "for to me to live is Christ."

It was not Paul. To live was not Paul. What did Paul have to do with anything? What kind of power did Paul have? Was it Paul's teaching? Were they Paul's people? Was Paul able to give them salvation? Of course not! To live is Christ! He is everything. He is all in all.

To conclude, turn to I Corinthians 15, and we will take this one more step further.

I Corinthians 15:20-28 But now Christ is risen from the dead, *and* has become the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep. For since by man *came* death, by Man also *came* the resurrection of the dead. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive. But each one in his own order: Christ the firstfruits, afterward those *who are* Christ's at His coming. Then *comes* the end, when He delivers the kingdom to God the Father, when He puts an end to all rule and all authority and power. For He must reign till He has put all enemies under His feet. The last enemy *that* will be destroyed *is* death. For "He has put all things under His feet." But when He says "all things are put under *Him*," *it is* evident that He who put all things under Him is excepted. Now when all things are made subject to Him, then the Son Himself will also be subject to Him who put all things under Him, that God may be all in all.

Yes, God loves us—the Israel of God—His firstfruits—the church of God—the Body of Christ. He wants all of us as members of His family. He wants us to live and to rule with Him for all eternity. And, He is willing to give us so much. He is willing to open up the floodgates of His Spirit should we need it. He is willing to give us His love, His joy, His peace; He is going to give us the strength to endure. He can give anything that He wants, anything that we need; He wants us there by His side forever.

But, we must ultimately recognize that we are not the center of the universe. We may be the apple of His eye, but we are not the center of the universe. God will give us these things because that is what He does. God is love. He gives and shares, and loves, and loves, and loves.

What we have to learn is that *He is the center of the universe!* And, His gifts to us will make it possible for us to bring Him glory, and praise for all eternity, because He deserves it!

That is the perspective that we need to have.

It is not about us. It is all about God!