Selfless Worship
1 Corinthians 11:17-34

Selfishness sabotages our worship. True worship drives away our selfishness and causes us to focus on God and to care for others. When we remember the selfless death of Jesus, we strive to make Him, rather than ourselves, the center of our worship.

**Selfishness sabotages worship**

**BUT**

**worship drives out selfishness!**

What happens when I bring an attitude of selfishness into the worship service? Can I authentically worship God when all I’m concerned about is myself?

- Imagine fighting for the best parking place or seat.
- Imagine coming in and feeling angry toward another Christian.
- Imagine judging somebody who is different from you and questioning whether they should be there.

When we worship God, we celebrate the death and resurrection of Jesus, which was a selfless act. Worship ought to drive selflessness from us, yet it often provokes selfishness.

In the early church, the divisions that ruled the Greek world often permeated the church. This was true in Corinth. Throughout the book, Paul has addressed people who use the church for status or who try to manipulate the gospel for their own ends.

Corinth was much like our own culture in that people believed in individual rights and they sought after significance and wealth and fame. They often brought those attitudes into worship with them. In this passage (11:17-34), Paul addresses the Lord’s Supper, because that was central to their worship services.

They were using the Lord’s Supper as an opportunity to highlight divisions between them, rather than as a chance to worship. Paul strongly chastises that behavior, because it is antithetically opposed to the character of Christ.

I think if Paul were writing to us, he’d ask this question: When you come to worship, are you thinking of how you can help others worship effectively, or are you only thinking of yourself?

College students, how can you use healthy bodies and energy and time to facilitate worship for families and older adults?

Adults and families, how can you encourage and facilitate worship for students, rather than always insisting on the best for yourself? How can you use your money and wisdom and resources for that purpose?

**Selfishness sabotages worship, but worship drives out selfishness.** That’s what Paul addresses in this passage as he writes to them about the Lord’s Supper.
When We Worship:

I. There Are No VIPs (17-22).

Paul tells this church that their worship gatherings actually make things worse rather than better. He even says in verse 22 that it would be best for them to just stay at home if they’re going to conduct themselves that way.

What was going on?
- Churches met in homes, not in special church buildings. Corinthian homes would have an outer atrium or courtyard and an inner dining room. The courtyard would be less comfortable, while the dining area would have pillows for reclining and probably a small table. The slaves and servants usually ate in the atrium, while the distinguished guests ate in the dining room.
- When they met for worship, they would probably each bring their own food, and obviously the wealthy had more to bring. They would partake of the bread, then eat a meal, then take the cup.
- The wealthy people were sitting in a special room and gorging themselves and getting drunk, all in the presence of the poorer people who were feasting on crumbs in the atrium.

Pliny the Younger quote – what is described here was common in Greek and Roman society.

There were literal divisions among them because of class and social status. Paul is probably being sarcastic in verse 19 – “there must be divisions, of course.” The idea is, “Gosh. How else can you know who is really important?” It’s irony. Some people thought they were important and they treated other people like nobodies.

Illustration: Getting to sit in business class on an international flight. Suddenly this makes more sense. What’s it like in the back versus the front? What if we bring that environment to our church worship? What about the attitudes that drive that environment?

Paul says that if they divide up that way, it’s not really the Lord’s Supper they are partaking, but their own! It would be better to just stay at home and get drunk than to worship the way they worshipped. What they are doing is actually idolatry of self.

Our culture, like theirs, thrives off of status and divisions. Just attend a college football game and observe all the categories of seats for different VIPs.

Paul says, “NO! There are no VIPs when we come to remember and celebrate Jesus.” All of us stand equally poor and naked in His presence.

Application: That means my preferences and comfort do not drive what we do. No matter how much you give, no matter how much you serve, no matter what position you hold in the world, when you come in here we’re all equal before God. Each of us is called to set aside VIP status and think about how we can serve and facilitate the worship of other people.

Worship isn’t just, “me and God,” but in fact also involves thinking of the needs of others. Do I pray for those who are struggling to get here? Do I look for ways to serve? Am I willing to park or sit farther away so somebody else can worship? Will I gladly give my money, without complaint, so that those who have less can share in it here?

There are no VIPs in this room. Nobody’s preferences or comfort takes precedence. We all stand in need of mercy and grace.
II. Jesus is the Center (23-27).

Paul reminds this church that the center of worship is Jesus. When they partake of the Lord’s Supper, they are remembering the death of Jesus. They are reenacting His last supper with His disciples. The bread represents His body, which He gave for us. The wine represents His blood. We memorialize and worship Jesus, not ourselves.

Jesus died and rose again to give us life, to forgive us from sin. If you come into this room, you should hear that preached AND see it modeled. We should extend to every person the mercy and grace of Jesus and care for each person as Jesus did.

Jesus is at the very center of why we are here.

Illustration: Every small child’s birthday party has kids who do not understand that the birthday child is at the center. How many of us have reminded our kids, “This party is not about you. The gifts are not for you. They are not going to sing to you. You don’t get the first slice of cake.” This is Billy’s party, not yours.

Church is Jesus’ party, not yours and not mine. He is the one to whom we sing, so it frankly matters very little whether we like the songs – they’re for Him. He is the one to whom we give, so it matters very little how much others are giving. He is the one we serve and praise and worship. Everything revolves around Him. That ought to drive selfish attitudes away from us. This should be the one spot on earth free of the factions and divisions that drive our world.

Jesus is not the audience. He’s not even just the subject of the sermons. He’s the very center of all we do. If there is a VIP, it’s Jesus.

When we meet together, we are here to reflect on His character and His work. When we partake of communion, the point is to orient ourselves around Him. His humble act of self-sacrifice then drives everything else we do.

Service, evangelism, singing, reading the Scripture, and prayer all flow from a proper understanding of Jesus and His work for us. So He is the very center. When we meet, we do it to remember Him. That is perhaps most effectively demonstrated in communion.

So that sort of central worship focus ought to drive out any thoughts of selfishness or self-interest or factionalism. All of us stand in awe and in submission to Jesus.

Lev 7 – Peace offering. They would worship God and out of that worship flowed sharing and concern for others. But it started with worship.

Application: When you come to worship or participate in communion, center your thoughts and feelings on Jesus first. Then look around as you come in the door. How can you serve? How can you set aside your needs and rights and facilitate worship for others?

When you leave, do you consider others? Do you look for those who need a friend and invite them to eat with you? Do you break out of your comfort zones and care for those who are different and sinful and not like you, because that’s what Jesus did for us?

III. Hypocrisy invites judgment (28-34).

Selfishness in worship amounts to idolatry, because it is worship of self rather than of God. That’s why God takes it so seriously, and that’s why men and women in Corinth were getting sick and dying.
God cares about the purity of His church. Judgment wasn’t just an Old Testament thing.

If we raise our hands to God, while insisting on our own selfish prerogatives, that is called hypocrisy. God hates hypocrisy.

When Paul says those who do these things are “guilty concerning the body and blood of Christ,” he means that when we enter worship with selfish motives and hearts, we actually align with the world. We line up with those who crucified Jesus, with the powerful and strong and tribal.

So God judges His people. Maybe now, maybe later. But He takes it very seriously.

**Micah 6:6-8**
With what shall I come to the Lord And bow myself before the God on high? Shall I come to Him with burnt offerings, With yearling calves? Does the Lord take delight in thousands of rams, In ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I present my firstborn for my rebellious acts, The fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the Lord require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God?

Micah 6:6-8 – That was a picture of what happens when we come and sing while we perform injustice, when we celebrate God’s mercy and grace with our lips while denying it with our hearts and lives. It’s serious and unacceptable.

So God judges His church. Paul is not saying that God takes away salvation, but He might allow people to become sick and die in order to purge the church. He might prevent the church from flourishing. He might judge us at the judgment seat of Christ. But He takes this very, very seriously. He wants us to be a living picture of Christ’s kindness and humility and love.

Illustration: George Whitefield thrived in England, at least partly because he allowed everybody to come hear the gospel on equal terms. In contrast, the Anglican church was segmented by class and controlled by the wealthy. So they faded into irrelevance eventually, while evangelicalism grew.

We must drive out of our heads the idea that we come here for our own comfort or pleasure or status. We are here to place Jesus at the center, remember Him, and help others know Him. Otherwise we run the real risk of obsolescence and judgment. God will not allow His church to live in idolatry and selfishness. He will always protect it, even if it means judging it.

**Conclusion**
So when you come in to worship:
- Check your heart. Who are you focusing on?
- Look around. How can you help those around you?