

## **Introduction**

Acclaimed Scottish poet Sir Walter Scott wrote a poem titled *The Lay of the Last Minstrel*. In Canto 6, he penned these unforgettable lines about self-absorbed people: **"Despite those titles, power, and pelf, The wretch concentrated all in self \* Living, shall forfeit fair renown, And doubly dying, shall do down \* To the vile dust, from whence he sprung, Unwept, unhonour'd, and unsung."** Notice the strong language he used, **"The wretch concentrated all in self."**

Let's be honest about this. People in their natural state, apart from Jesus, are wretches centered in self. That's why Paul writes what He does in our text. We need to get over ourselves and that's I'm preaching about today.

## **The Humility of Jesus**

Let's begin with verses 6-8, which explain the humility of Jesus.

Verse 6 states that He existed **"in the form of God"** and that He had **"equality with God."** That terminology teaches us that Jesus is God. He possesses all the attributes of God. He is all-knowing, all-powerful, everywhere present, and so on. But notice what happened according to verses 7-8. He was **"made in the likeness of men"** and was **"found in appearance as a man."** That means He became like the human beings He had created in the essential aspects of their humanity: the biological, the psychological, and the relational.

Verse 8 goes on to describe what He did as the God-man. He **"humbled Himself."** I overheard a mother tell her teenage daughter, **"You're so wrapped up in yourself."** That's an instructive idiom. The word **"humbled"** in verse 8 conveys that Jesus was wrapped up in others not Himself. For 33 years, in the day-to-day routines of life, He always desired and pursued the well-being and joy of others over His own. That humility of His was then climaxed on the cross where He suffered and died so that you and I could live – abundantly now and fully forever.

## Human Beings – Wrapped Up in Ourselves

That's the humility of Jesus and notice what Paul does in verse 5. He makes it personal to us. He commands, **"Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus."** That command implies that there are two kinds of people in life. There are those who are not like Jesus. They're wrapped up in themselves. There are those who are like Jesus. They're wrapped up in others. Which are you and I?

I read about an old Moorish palace that has a grotto-like entrance into which tourists are invited one by one to come. That entrance then leads into a series of rooms that contain nothing except ceilings and walls entirely covered by mirrors. The intended effect is that no matter where you look, all you can see is yourself. That assists us in defining what it means, generally, to be wrapped up in ourselves. We perceive and interpret everyone and everything primarily in terms of us, and act accordingly.

The *Gospel Herald* magazine published a ditty that fleshes out what this posture looks like in real life: **"Think about yourself. Talk about yourself. Use 'I' as often as possible. Mirror yourself continually in the opinion of others. Listen eagerly to what people say about you. Be suspicious. Expect to be appreciated. Be jealous and envious. Be sensitive to slights. Never forgive criticism. Trust nobody but yourself. Insist on consideration and the proper respect. Demand agreement with your own views on everything. Sulk if people are not grateful to you for favors. Never forget a service you rendered. This is an infallible recipe for misery."**

A pastor admits, for instance, that early in his career, the question he always asked himself about the people he led was, **"How can these people help me?"** He wanted to use people, he says, to help him accomplish his goals. He goes on to write **"It took me a couple of years to realize I had everything backward and should have been asking, 'How can I help these people?'"**

That pastor, early in his career, is par for the course. He represents

typical humanity. The Bible teaches that human beings are born with a sinful nature. The essence of that nature is “**selfishness**” and “**conceit**” to quote Paul in verse 3. People in their fallen state are self-centered in other words. A well-worn joke that’s now almost a cliché expresses it well: “**Enough about me, let’s talk about you. What do you think of my new haircut?**” That is the very embodiment of being wrapped up in themselves, which most people are.

### **Get Over Yourself**

But you and I, apprentices of Jesus, shouldn’t be. In his book *Failing Forward*, John Maxwell shares 15 steps to personal success. One of those is this, “**Get over yourself – everyone else has.**” That’s precisely what Paul exhorts us to do in verses 3-4. Get over ourselves!

It’s helpful to doing so to grasp why we get wrapped up in ourselves in the first place. A primary reason is that we feel like we’re missing something in our lives and so strive to get it.

A psychologist published a chart that has two sides. One side is an inner need we have. The other side is how we feel if that need is unmet. The first inner need is belonging. We feel insecure if it’s unmet. The second need is worth. We feel inferior if it’s unmet. The third need is competence. We feel inadequate if it’s unmet. And the fourth need is purpose. We feel insignificant if it’s unmet.

Most people who are wrapped up in themselves feel like they’re missing one of more of those needs and are striving to get it. People who feel insecure are wrapped up in themselves because they’re striving to get belonging. People who feel inferior are striving to get worth. People who feel inadequate are striving to get competence. And people who feel insignificant are striving to get purpose.

But whatever the reason, being wrapped up in ourselves is a recipe for misery. Antislavery reformer Henry Ward Beecher said it well, “**No man is more cheated than the selfish man.**” He was right. Selfishness cheats us out of the love, joy, and peace all of us want. It

does so because it generates almost all of the habits of evil that plague our psychological and social lives. I'm talking about habits of evil like anger, envy, impatience, hyper-sensitivity, malice, contempt, and countless more. Those habits of evil are rooted in our self-centeredness.

Marital problems demonstrate what I mean. Fighting spouses sit in my office, each rehearsing a litany of complaints about the other. I eventually tell them all the same thing: **"Those complaints of yours are only symptoms, not the problem. You're self-centered. You're both wrapped up in yourselves. That's the problem."**

For love, joy, and peace to prevail in our relationships and lives, we absolutely must get over ourselves. We must and we can – if we apprentice ourselves to Jesus. We arrange our affairs around engaging Him and His kingdom at hand. He then infuses His presence and power into us as we do. His presence and power in turn enable us to do two things, which together constitute getting over ourselves. Let's examine both of those, the two things that together constitute getting ourselves.

### **Put Others First in Our Thinking**

The first is found in verse 3. Notice the words **"mind"** and **"regard."** Paul's talking here about our mental posture. He's saying that we should put others first, before us, in our thinking.

He goes on to tell us how to do that in verse 3, **"regard one another as more important than yourselves."** Scripture teaches that all human beings are equally valuable. That's the objective reality. But subjectively, in our minds, we should think of it this way. Others are more important than we are. They aren't but for the purpose of directing our interactions with them, we perceive them to be.

Ponder how this works in day-to-day life. I think that my opponent in the ping pong tournament is more important than I am. I think that the driver who wants the same parking space that I do is more important than I am. I think that the co-worker who slanders me is more important than I. I think that the waitress who gets my order wrong is more

important than I am. I think that my spouse who is opposing my will is more important than I am. You get the idea. In all the routine activities, experiences, and events of everyday life, we perceive the people involved in those as more important than we are.

Perceiving people that way requires something of us. I've preached for years what our first priority as apprentices of Jesus is. It's to build a purposeful, objective, and thorough vision of God by learning everything the Bible teaches us about Him. In a similar way, we must build a purposeful, objective, and thorough vision of human beings by learning everything the Bible teaches us about them. That vision of them causes us to recognize their limitless value and worth. Recognizing their value and worth in turn allows us to put them first in our thinking.

Let me give you a sampling of what the Bible teaches us about human beings. Each one is the following: in the image of God, formed by God in the womb, loved infinitely by God, watched and assessed unceasingly by God, blessed by God, one for whom Jesus died, and an immortal with a never-ending future as either a heavenly or hellish creature. Those propositions and more should be part of the vision each of us has of every person we encounter every day.

If they are, we'll be inclined to do precisely what Paul exhorts us to do in verse 3. We'll recognize their limitless value and worth. And because we recognize their limitless value and worth, we'll put them first in our thinking. We'll perceive them to be more important than we are.

### **Put Others First in Our Acting**

Getting over ourselves means to do a second thing. We put others first in our acting. There are two sides to this kind of acting.

The first is the negative side in verse 4, "**do not merely look out for your own personal interests.**" Social critic Nicolaus Mills identifies a typical human trait. He states that we're "**hard on others if we think the results will benefit us.**" We better ourselves at their expense in other words. We cause or allow harm to come to them in order to get

what we desire or need. But that's only logical in our natural state. Since we think we're more important than they are, it'd be an injustice if we didn't. The first line in verse 4 though prohibits that. Since we think others are more important than we are, we're never hard on them in order to benefit us. We never pursue what we desire or need at their expense. It'd be illogical, absurd, if we did.

That's the negative and it makes way for the positive in the second line of verse 4, "**look out also for the interests of others.**" We pursue the well-being and joy of others over our own. We make our desires and needs subservient to theirs. We do this in a whole host of practical ways as the opportunities arise. Author Shirl Hoffman identifies four of those. We bestow honor on others, seek their advancement, recognize their superiority, and show esteem for their gifts. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 reveals several more. We rejoice when others outshine us, grieve over their sins, bear long with their flaws, sacrifice our needs and wants to meet theirs, be thick-skinned when they speak and act, behave appropriately in their presence, believe the best about them until we know otherwise, listen more than speak, and don't make them pay for wronging us. Those are a few of the countless ways that we pursue the interests of others over our own.

I'll never forget what a Christian college track coach told me. He prayed before every meet and asked God to help his team's opponents to perform their very best – even if it meant his team losing if they did. Notice what he did. He put others (his opponents) first (before him) in his thinking and his acting, which is what it means to get over ourselves.

## **Conclusion**

So, let's do just that. The words of John Ruskin explain why we should, "**When a man is wrapped up in himself, he makes a pretty small package.**" Conversely, when a man is wrapped up in others, he makes a big package. Let me ask you a question in closing. What kind of package are you? Get over yourself and be a big one.