

**The Sin and Danger of Self-Love Described,  
in a sermon preached at Plymouth, in New England, 1621  
by Robert Cushman**

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Scriptures: 1 Corinthians 10:24

*Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth. 1 Corinthians 10:24*

The occasion of these words of the apostle Paul was because of the abuses that were in the church in Corinth. These abuses arose chiefly through swelling pride, self-love, and conceitedness. Of this the apostle complains of very often: at first, in the carnal divisions (chapter 1); then in their extolling their eloquent teachers and despising Paul (chapter 4); then in their offensive going to law, before the heathen judges (chapter 6); then in eating things offered to idols, to the destroying of the tender consciences of their brethren (chapter 8); then in the insatiable love feasts, in the time and place of their church meetings, the rich who would feed to fullness, despising and contemning the poor, that had not the means to lay it on as they had (chapter 11). Or not finally, in both epistles, he very often nips at them for their pride and self-love, so that in the last chapter he wills them again and again to prove, try, and examine themselves, to see whether Christ were in them or not – for of them seemed (as thousands do at this day) to soar aloft and go with full sail to heaven; yet as men that row in boats set their faces one way and then their whole body goes apace another way, so there are many who set such a face upon religion, and have their mouth full of great swelling words, as if they would even blow open the doors of heaven, yet despising all humble minded and broken hearted people. What do they else but join flesh to spirit, serving not God, but serving their bellies, whose end will be damnation, except a speedy and sound remedy be thought of. This remedy is that which our Savior taught the rich young man, and which Paul here prescribes, in willing them not to seek their own, but every man another's wealth.

As God then did direct this apostle to lay down this brief direction as a remedy for the evil in Corinth so you may think it is by God's special providence that I now speak to you from this text and say in your heart, "Surely something is amiss this way. Let us know it and amend it."

The parts of this text are two. 1. A dehortation. 2. An exhortation. The decoration, "Let no man seek his own." The exhortation, "but every man another's wealth."

In handling of which I will firstly open the words. Secondly gather the doctrine. Thirdly illustrate the doctrine. Fourthly apply the same.

The proper drift of the apostle here is not to tax the Corinthians for seeking their own evil ends in evil actions, but for aiming at themselves and their own benefits in *lawful* actions which appear in the former verse, where he says, "all things are lawful, &c." viz: to eat any of God's creatures offered to idols or not, feast and be married together, to show love and kindness to this or that person, &c. When by such means we seek ourselves and have not a charitable loving and reverent regard for others, then they are unexpedient,

unprofitable, unlawful, and must be forborne. And he that has not learned to deny himself even the very use of lawful things, when it tends to the contempt, reproach, grief, offense, and shame of his other brethren and associates, hath learned nothing aright, but is apparently a man that seeks himself, and against whom the Apostle deals most properly.

The meaning then summarily is: the bane of all these mischiefs which arise among you is, that men are too cleaving to themselves and their own matters, and disregard all others. Therefore I charge you, let this self-seeking be left off, and turn the stream another way. Namely, seek the good of your brethren, please them, honor them, reverence them, for otherwise it will never go well among you.

This, the wisdom of God did well foresee, and has no caveats in the scriptures, neither to tax men nor forewarn them *from* loving others. Neither does God say anywhere, "Let no man seek out the good of another." Rather, "Let no man seek *his own*," and everywhere in the scriptures he has set watchwords against self-good, self-profit, self-seeking, &c. And thus the sense being clear, I come to the doctrine.

*All men are too apt and ready to seek themselves too much, and to prefer their own matters and causes beyond the due and lawful measure, even to access an offence against God, yay endangering their own souls.*

Does not experience teach that even among professors of religion, almost all the love and favor that is shown to others is with a secret aim at themselves. They will take pains to do a man good, provided that he will take twice so much for them. They will give a penny so as it may advantage them a pound, labor hard so as all the profit may come to themselves, else they are heartless and feeble. The vein and corrupt heart of man cannot better be resembled than by a belly-god, host, or innkeeper which welcomes his guests with smilings and salutations and a thousand welcomes and rejoices greatly to have their company to dice, cards, eat, drink, and be merry. But, should the box not be paid, the pot not be filling, and the money telling all this while, the epicure's joy would soon be turned into sorrow, and his smiles turned into frowns, and the door set open, and their absence craved.

And where is that man to be found that will disperse abroad, and cast his bread upon the waters, that will lend, looking for nothing again, that will do all duties to others freely and cheerfully in conscience to God and love unto men, without his close and secret ends or aiming at himself. Such a man is a black swan, a white crow almost, and yet such shall stand before God with boldness at the last day – when others who have sought themselves, though for love of themselves they have sought heaven, yay, through self-love persuaded themselves they should fit in, yet wanting love unto others, they will be found as sounding brass and as a tinkling cymbal.

But that I may not walk in generalities, the particular ways by which men seek their own are these:

First, such as our covetous, seeking their own by seeking riches, wealth, money – as Felix pretending love unto Paul, sent for him often, but it was in hope of money. If a man can tell how to get gold out of flint and silver out of the adamant, no pains shall be spared, no time shall be neglected, for gold is their hope and the wedge of gold is their confidence.

Indeed, here is the difference between a covetous worldling and an honest thrifty Christian: it is lawful sometimes for men to gather wealth, and grow rich, even as there was a time for Joseph to store up corn, but a godly and sincere Christian will see when this time is, and will not hoard up when he sees others of his brethren and associates in want. Then is a time, if he have anything, to fetch it out and disperse it.

The second way by which men seek their own is when they seek ease or pleasure. There is a generation which thinks to have been born to take their pleasures and their ease. Let the roof of the house drop through, they stir not. Let the field be overgrown with weeds, they care not. They must not foul their hands or wet their foot. Such idle drones are intolerant in a settled commonwealth, much more in a commonwealth which is but, as it were, in the bud.

The third way is when men seek their own bellies, as some did in the Apostles' times, which went about with new doctrines and devices, knowing that the people had itching ears and would easily entertain and willingly feed such novelties - which brought in dissensions, schisms, and contentions. Certainly there are some men which shape even their religion, human state, and all, even as the belly cheer is best. Let all conscience, care of others go. Let Lazarus starve at the gate. Let Joseph's affliction be increased. They must have their dishes, their dainties, or no content.

And the difference between a temperate good man and a belly-god is this: a good man will not eat his morsels alone, especially if he have better than others. But if, by God's providence, he have gotten some meat which is better than ordinary and better than his other brethren, he can have no rest in himself, except he make others partake with him.

The fourth way by which men seek their own is by seeking outward honor, fame, and respect with men; as King Saul when he had lost all respect and favor with God, then thought to give content to his heart by being honored before the elders of the people. It is amazing to see how some men are "desirous of vain glory" (Gal. 5:26), and how earnestly they seek praise, favor, and respect with men and can have no quiet longer than their worldly favor lasts. They will disgrace, reproach, and disdain others to gain honor and advancements to themselves. They will make bold with the scriptures and Word of God to rest and wring and slight it over for their credit's sake.

The fifth way which men seek their own is by seeking to have their wills, as the wrongdoers in Corinth who thought it not enough to do wrong and harm to their brethren, but to have them before the Heathen magistrates. Truly, some men are so prince-like, or rather Papal, that their very will and word is become law and if they have said it, it must be so, else there is no rest or quietness to be had.

(Quest.) But some men happily say to me, is true that some men seek their own by all these ways, *But what should be the reason and cause of this, that man seeks so earnestly themselves, in seeking riches, honor, ease, belly-cheer, will, &c.?*

The reasons and causes are specifically these three:

Firstly, pride in high conceitedness, when men overvalue themselves.

Secondly, amount of due consideration and valuation of other men's endowments and abilities.

Thirdly, lack of heavenly conversations and spiritual eye to behold the glory, greatness, and majesty and goodness of God.

But it is time to come to apply these things more particularly to ourselves and to see what uses to be made of them.

*Use 1.* It is so, that God sees a proneness in all the sons of Adam to seek themselves too much and has given them warnings and watch-words thereof, as we have heard, and does not experience confirm it? Thus are proved a number of men who think they can never show love enough to themselves, nor seek their own enough, but think all costs, charges, cherishing, praise, honor, &c. too little for them. But if they do a little for another man, they accounted a great matter though it be but a morsel of bread or a single penny. No varieties of dainties is too good for them, no silk, purple cloth, or stuff is too good to clothe them. If God had anywhere in all the scriptures said, "love thyself, make much of thyself, &c." there were some reason for thee to take up a niggard's proverbs, "Every man for himself and God for us all," "Charity begins at home," &c. But God never taught thee these things. No, they are Satan's positions.

Some may object: It is a point of good natural policy for a man to care and provide for himself. What shall I say? Even hogs, dogs, and brute beasts know their own ease, and can seek that which is good for themselves. And what does this shifting, prodding, and fat feeding which some use more resemble anything then hogs? So let it be what natural policy it will.

*Use 2.* If God sees this disease of self-love so dangerous in us, then it stands us all in hand to suspect ourselves and so to seek out the root of this disease that it may be cured. Let every man's heart smite him and let him fall to the examination of himself and see whether he loves not riches and worldly wealth too much.

See whether thy heart cannot be as merry and thy mind as joyful and thy countenance as cheerful with course fare, with pulse, bread and water (if God provide no better, nor the times afford other), as if thou had the greatest dainties. So also whether thou can be content as well with scorns of men when thou hast done well, as with their praises, so if thou can with comfort and good conscience say, "I'll pass little for man's judgment."

It is reported that there are many men gone to that other plantation in Virginia, which, while they lived in England seemed very religious, zealous, and conscionable, have now lost even the sap of grace and the edge of all goodness, and are become mere worldlings. This testimony I believe to be partly true, and amongst many causes of it, this self-love is not the least! No doubt, when they have taken in hand hither to come out of discontentment in regard to their estate in England, are aiming at great matters here, affecting it to be gentlemen, landed men, or hoping for office, place, dignity, or fleshly liberty. Let the show be what it will, the substance is naught, and that bird of self-love which was hatched at home, if it be not locked to, will eat out the life of all grace and goodness. And though men have escaped the danger of the sea and the cruel mortality which swept away so many of our loving friends and brethren, yet except they purge out this self-love, a worse mischief is prepared for them.

But I have dwelt too long on this first part. I come now to the second which in concerns the Exhortation, as I showed you in the division: *But to every man another's wealth.*

In direct opposition, he should say, "let every man seek another's," but the first part being compared to the latter, and "seek" being taken out of the former and put to the latter, and "wealth" taken out or rather implied in the former, the whole sentence is thus resolved: "Let no man seek his own wealth, but let every man seek another's wealth."

And the word here translated "wealth" is the same with that in Romans 13:4 and may not be taken only for riches, as Englishmen commonly understand it, but for all kinds of benefits, favors, comforts, either for soul or body. So here again, as before you must understand an Affirmative Commandment, as the Negative was before. And lest any should say, "If I may not seek my own good, I may do nothing," "Yes," says Paul, "I'll tell thee thou shalt seek the good of another. Whereas now all thy seeking helps but one, by this means thou shalt help many."

The point of instruction is taken from the very letter and phrase, viz: (Doctrine 2) *A man must seek the good, the wealth, the profit of others.*

I say *must* seek it, he must seek the comfort, profit, and benefit of his neighbor, brother, associate, &c. His own good he need not seek; it will offer itself to him every hour. But the good of others must be sought. And howsoever some may think this too large a practice, since now the world is so full of people, yet I see not but the more people there is, the larger charity ought to be.

But be it so, as a man may neglect in some sort the general world, yet those to whom he is bound, either in natural, civil, or religious bands, them he must seek how to do them good. So this people in Corinth, to whom Paul writes, they were in spiritual league and covenant in the gospel, and so were a body. Now for one member in the body to see himself and neglect all others, were as if a man should clothe one arm or one leg of his body with gold and purple, and let the rest of the members go naked. (1 Cor. 12:27)

Now brethren, I pray you, remember yourselves and know that you are not in a retired monastical course, but had given your names and promises one to another and covenanted here to cleave together in the service of God and the King. What then must you do? May you live as retired hermits and look after nobody? Nay, you must seek still the wealth of one another and inquire how lives such a man – How is he clad? How is he fed? He is my brother, my associate. We ventured our lives together here and had a hard brunt of it and we are in league together. Is his labor harder than mine? surely I will ease him. Hath he no bed to lie on? why I have two, I will lend him one. Hath he no apparel? why I have two suits, I will give him one of them. Eats he coarse fair, bread and water, and I have better? why surely we will part stakes. He is as good a man as I, and we are bound each to other so that his wants must be my wants, his sorrows my sorrows, his sickness my sickness, and his welfare my welfare – for I am as he is.

But besides these motives, there are other reasons to provoke us not only to do good one to another, and even to seek and search how to do it:

As first, to maintain modesty in all our associates, for hungry wanters become bold beggars and imprudent cravers. For as one says of women, that when they have lost their shamefacedness they have lost half their honesty, so may it be truly said of a man that when he has lost his modesty and puts on a begging face, he has lost his majesty and the image of that noble creature.

It wonderfully encourages men in their duties when they see the burden equally born. But when some withdraw themselves and retire to their own particular ease, pleasure, or profit, what heart can men have to go on in their business? When men are come together to lift some weighty piece of timber or vessel, if one stands still and does not lift, shall not the rest be weakened and disheartened? Will not a few idle drones spoil the whole stock of laborious bees? So one idle-belly, one murderer, one complainer, one self-lover will weaken and dishearten the whole colony.

The present necessity requires it. The country is yet raw, the land untilled, the cities not builded, the cattle not settled. We are compassed about with a helpless and idle people, the natives of the country, which cannot in any commonly or comfortable manner help themselves, much less us. Besides, how many of our dear friends did here die at our first entrance, many of them no doubt for want of good lodging, shelter, and comfortable things, and many more may go after them quickly if care not be taken.

And even the example of God himself, who we should follow in all things within our power and capacity, may teach us this lesson. For (with reverence to His Majesty be it spoken) he might have kept all grace, goodness, and glory to himself. But he has communicated it to us, even as far as we are capable of it in this life, and will communicate his glory in all fullness with his elect in the life to come. Even so, his son Jesus Christ, left his glory and abased himself to a poor and distressed life in this world that he might, by it, bring us to happiness in the world to come. If God then has delighted in thus doing good and relieving frail and miserable man, so far inferior to himself, what delight ought man to have to relieve and comfort man which is equal to himself?

Even as we deal with others, ourselves and others will be dealt withal.

Lastly, a merciless man, a man without natural affection or love, is reckoned among such as are given over of God to a reprobate mind (Romans 1:30), and (as it were) transformed into a beast like humor. For what is man if he be not sociable, kind, affable, free hearted, liberal. He is a beast in the shape of a man. Or rather an infernal spirit walking among men, which makes the world a hell what in him lies.

Let this be the first rule (which I will with two others conclude for this time):

*One:* Never measure thy course by the most, but by the best, yea, and principally by God's word. Look not what others do to thee, but consider what thou art to do to them. Seek to please God, not thy self.

*Two:* Let there be no prodigal person to come forth and say, give me the portion of lands and goods that appertain to me, and let me shift for myself (Luke 15:12). It is yet too soon to put men to their shifts. Why would thou have thy particular portion, but because thou think to live better than thy neighbor.

*Three:* Lay away all thought of former things and forget them, and think upon the things that are. Look not gaping only one upon other, pleading your goodness, your birth, your life you lived, your means you had and might have had. Here you are by God's providence. Be thankful to God it is no worse and take it in good part that which is. God and natural necessity require it. If your difficulties be great, you had need to cleave the faster together and comfort and cheer up one another, laboring to make each other's burden lighter. There is no grief so tedious as a churlish companion. Nothing makes sorrows easy more than cheerful associates. Bear ye, therefore, one another's burden and be not a burden on to another. And it shall go well with your souls when that God of peace and unity shall come to visit you with death as he has so many of your associates. Amen.