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Message: Christ Is God's Antidote to the Self-destructive Sin of Narcissism

Text: John 5:30-44

Introduction

- A. While we need to be wary of false teachers and teachings within the church that would draw the church away from her sincere devotion to Christ as Lord, we must also be wary of the encroachment of cultural values from outside the church that would sometimes subtly transform the culture of the church into something no longer recognizable as Christianity.
- B. One of the values of our culture is the promotion and exaltation of "self." This has gotten so out of hand in our culture that it is rightly described by the term "narcissism." "Narcissism" is the inordinate fascination and preoccupation with oneself, excessive self-love resulting in the craving for admiration. It comes from the name of an individual in Greek mythology, Narcissus, who saw his reflection in a pool of water (a selfie) and fell in love with himself and his beauty.

I. Narcissism's encroachment and impact on humanity.

- A. Narcissism has plagued the human race ever since Satan tempted Eve with the narcissistic, grandiose vision of herself being like God.
- B. During the 6th century BC, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar created his own "selfie" as it were, a 90 foot statue of himself, and invited the leadership of his kingdom to come and bow down and worship his image, or in social media terms, to "like" him.
- C. Narcissism encroached on the religious community of Jesus's day in a way that left it at cross purposes with God's purpose for His people's conformity to the image of His Son by a faith that follows the humble, selfless Christ. Notice the attitude of the religious leaders of Jesus's day versus Christ's own selfless attitude.

John 5:30 "I can do nothing on My own initiative. As I hear, I judge; and My judgment is just, because **I do not seek My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me.** ... ⁴¹ **"I do not receive glory from men;**

John 5:44 **"How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another** and you do not seek the glory that is from the *one and* only God?

- D. All of us born with a sinful nature, lean toward having an inordinate preoccupation with self. Like a helium balloon that rises without any ribbon of restraint, so our natural tendency is to exalt ourselves. The less restraint by parents, culture, faith in the Lord, the more narcissism we display.
- E. Have you noticed an increasing lack of restraint of narcissism in our present day culture?
 - 1. My generation, the Baby Boomers (1946 - 1964) became known as the "look at me" generation.
 - 2. Athletes are today less restrained in expressing their narcissism than in the past. In the early 1980's New York Jets all pro defensive end Mark Gastineau started a trend of self-congratulatory celebrations after each play he made on the field. It gained the criticism of other players at the time, but today it is typical behavior.
 - 3. In 2013 the word "selfie" was entered into the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, and was Oxford Dictionary's word of the year. Narcissism exists everywhere outside social media, but social media both displays and exacerbates the increasing narcissism of our culture.

4. Social Times, a web site that covers social media, had a January 6th article by David Cohan titled, "Selfies, Narcissism and Social Media," where he cited statistics of our culture's growing "selfie obsession"
 - a. 74% of all images shared on Snapchat are selfies.
 - b. 6,000 selfies are posted on Instagram every minute
 - c. 19 out of 20 teens have taken a selfie

5. The narcissistic addiction to the affirmation of others is recognized by secular observers of our culture. A CBS News article titled, "How real a risk is social media addiction" states, "some aspects of social media activity (for example, getting "likes") appear to stimulate reward centers in the brain." The article goes on to quote a social media marketer who became aware of his own addiction to the affirmation of others. "A blog post by social media marketer Jason Thibeault, 'Why I Just Quit Facebook,' is sparking new debate about the risks of social media addiction. Thibeault's essay went viral soon after he posted it on LinkedIn on Thursday, getting more than 700,000 views the next day. ... Why did Thibault find Facebook, in particular, so addictive? He writes that it's because "we are essentially narcissistic and want to be the center of attention.... I want them to pay attention to me, to 'like' me, that's why."

6. What has always perplexed me about the interaction among "friends" responding with "likes" and comments on social media (there are also plenty of unfriendly posts) is that basic sinful human nature doesn't really care about anyone other than self. I was rudely awakened to this when drafted into the U.S. Army, and I know human nature hasn't changed for the better since then, so there must be some kind of unspoken social contract where people get something for themselves for responding to selfies and posts of others. An interview this past week by a Chicago radio station of three popular teenage girls gives some insight. They agree that there are unwritten, understood rules that if you are my friend and I post a selfie, you will respond with a like or comment - within about 10 minutes. To fail to respond is considered "cold," leaving your friend hanging for the virtual world to see that you don't care, which embarrasses your friend by refusing the affirmation she is seeking by posting her pic. So basically the social contract is, "you feed my desire for affirmation and I'll feed your same desire." And the world's self-created ethic is, "you are kind if you do, and cold if you don't." (Play audio clip)

II. Our culture's increasing narcissism is encroaching on the culture of Christ's church.

- A. Like the proverbial frog in the kettle, the gradual encroachment of our culture's growing narcissism threatens to increasingly conform us to the image of our self-exalting culture rather than to the image of God's humble Son without our realizing it.

- B. That the narcissism of our present culture is encroaching upon the culture of the evangelical church is most apparent in the way Christians too often use social media (not **that** we use it, but the **way** in which we too often use it), building facebook, instagram, snapchat, twitter accounts as alters of self-worship, inviting others to join in such worship by their "likes" and "comments." How is this practice any different from Dave Holder's quip, "But enough of me talking about me. Now why don't you talk about me?" Instead of humbling ourselves before one another, do we embrace the social contract created by our culture to feed one another's idolatry and addiction to the exaltation of self? Do we unwittingly embrace the cultures ethics that this is a kind thing to do, that this is what friends do?

1. Brothers and sisters, this is not kind. This is not what friends do to friends who are tempted or addicted to receiving affirmation and glory from others rather than from the Lord! If your friend were battling addiction to alcohol, would you keep giving him or her another drink?

Proverbs 22:4 **The reward of humility** and the fear of the LORD are riches, honor and life.

Proverbs 15:33 The fear of the LORD is the instruction for wisdom, and **before honor comes humility**.

2. Are some of our “likes” and comments nothing more than deceitful kisses? These “kisses” (“likes”) are deceitful because they are insincere, or because they do harm by feeding the other person’s narcissistic appetite or your own appetite to be liked - something a true friend would not do.

Proverbs 27:5 Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed.⁶ Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but **deceitful are the kisses of an enemy.**

C. The sin of narcissism leads to other sins and the collateral damage of others.

1. Narcissism can lead to a loss of integrity.

- a. 36% of selfies are altered or enhanced. While it is not necessarily sinful to improve the quality of a picture, the question is, “Why are you doing it?”

- b. Andie Roeder Moody is web content manager and writer at North Park University and a former staffer at Christianity Today magazine. She writes last month about her Chicago neighborhood:

“They crowd local restaurants, sipping Pabst Blue Ribbon from a can and capturing it all on social media. ... When you constantly watch the couples in coffee shops and restaurants practically having photoshoots for every single outing (perfecting the “candid” shot), all that #authentic life starts to look little #disingenuous.

As with our lifestyles broadcast on social media, there’s mounting pressure for all of us—even kids and teens—to show how *cool* we are online. Many of today’s teens have had smartphones since they were in elementary school, and they’re being pressured to define themselves on social media.

On Instagram, Snapchat, Twitter, and Facebook, they amass huge social media followings among each other. ... I see the way this pressure affects younger women in my life, and I worry about how all this social media performance affects their identity. ... Of course, the temptation to perform for each other, rather than to simply live, is as old as time itself. ... I worry about these trends encouraging us to essentially distort the truth. As Christians, our identity is deeply rooted in a vulnerable Christ and a communal story of confession—which is the act of prioritizing honesty with one another over self-image. Beyond that, due to the redemptive work of Christ, we have no need to perform for each other, or prove ourselves, online or anywhere else. ... Our efforts to commemorate and celebrate day-to-day moments have, in many cases, become a distraction from them. (If, like me, you’ve found yourself thinking about how to make a moment more Instagramable, you’ve probably developed an unhealthy relationship with that medium.)”

2. Our narcissism tempts others to become jealous, discontent. When they see our supposedly perfect life posted online, others might be envious - why can’t my life be that much fun, that cool. Why wasn’t I invited?

III. The way of Christ is the way of the cross, not one of self-exaltation, but one of self-denial and self-humiliation, waiting for God to exalt us at the proper time.

Luke 9:23 And He was saying to *them* all, "If anyone wishes to come after Me, **he must deny himself, and take up his cross daily and follow Me.**

John 3:30 "He must increase, but **I must decrease.**

1 Peter 5:5 ... all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.⁶ Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time,

IV. Narcissism and justifying faith in Christ cannot exist together.

Luke 18:14 "I tell you, **this man went to his house justified rather than the other**; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted."

John 5:44 "**How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another** and you do not seek the glory that is from the *one and* only God?"

- A. We cannot simultaneously exalt Christ as the chief object of our adoration and affection - it has to be one or the other.
- B. This is why we call narcissism a self-destructive sin. No one can live by justifying faith in Christ while living by narcissism, the exaltation of self. Don't dismiss, diminish, or be unaware of the danger. (Show shark/selfie slide).

V. Christ is God's antidote to the self-destructive sin of narcissism.

- A. Even the ancient Greeks realized the self-destructive nature of narcissism. Their mythological story of Narcissus ends with him being so enamored by his reflection of himself in a pool of water that he could not pull himself away from this ancient selfie - and as a result he died.
- B. We cannot deliver ourselves from narcissism. But God has sent His Son to deliver us from our addictive enslavement to self-exaltation and self-worship.

1 Peter 2:24 and He Himself bore our sins in His body on the cross, **so that we might die to sin and live to righteousness**; for by His wounds you were healed.

2 Corinthians 5:14 For the love of Christ controls us, having concluded this, that **one died for all, therefore all died**; ¹⁵ and He died for all, **so that they who live might no longer live for themselves, but for Him who died and rose again on their behalf**.

Conclusion: What shall we do?

- A. For some of us, we might need to shut down a particular social media account, realizing it has become a particular cause of temptation and stumbling to us. Try going without it for two days. If we can't live without it, how will we truly live with it? Jesus said, ...

Matthew 5:30 "**If your right hand makes you stumble, cut it off and throw it from you**; for it is better for you to lose one of the parts of your body, than for your whole body to go into hell.

- B. For all of us, we need to be honest before God about our motivation for posting selfies and other posts. This might result in our posting less, responding less, and spending less time trolling through the posts of others. Andie Moody again writes:

"When I scroll through my social media feeds, what I see are pleas: *Affirm me*. ... After realizing how I was looking for affirmation in social media notifications—and even tailoring my posts to make them as likeable as possible—I've been trying change my approach. That means paying attention not only to my motivation when I post, but my reactions when I see others' updates ..., and adjusting my social media engagement accordingly."

- C. Be on guard against every form of self-destructive narcissism and cling wholeheartedly to Christ, for He said ...

John 5:44 "**How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and you do not seek the glory that is from the one and** only God?"