

I See Things Upside Down

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Date: 19 April 2026

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[0 : 00] The following message is given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee. For more information about Trinity Grace, please visit us at TrinityGraceAthens.com.

! 1 Corinthians chapter 4, look there with me in verse 6. I have applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brothers.

That you may learn by us not to go beyond what was written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against the other. For who sees anything different in you?

What do you have that you did not receive? And if then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it? Already you have all that you want. Already you have become rich.

Without us you have become kings. And would that you did reign so that we could share the rule with you. For I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all.

[1 : 13] Like men sentenced to death. Because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels and to men. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ.

We are weak, but you are strong. You are held in honor, but we in disrepute. To the present hour we hunger and thirst.

We are poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless. And we labor, working with our own hands. When reviled, we bless. When persecuted, we endure.

When slandered, we entreat. We have become and still are. Like the scum of the earth, the refuse of all things. Verse 14.

I do not write these things to make you ashamed, but to admonish you as my beloved children. For though you have countless guides in Christ, you do not have many fathers.

[2 : 16] For I became your father in Christ Jesus through the gospel. I urge you then, be imitators of me. That is why I sent Timothy, my beloved and faithful child in the Lord, to remind you of all my ways in Christ.

As I teach them everywhere in every church. This is the word of the Lord. Praise the Lord. Please be seated. May God bless preaching of his word.

Help us. Give us minds to understand. In the 1960s, a murder took place in a Chinese restaurant in London. The trial was later recorded or recounted in one of London's newspapers.

And one of the restaurant's waiters that night was one of the key witnesses for the prosecution. The prosecution built their case and then they called the Chinese waiter to the stand to testify.

The prosecutor asked the waiter if he was able to recognize the person who had committed the murder. And his response stunned the courtroom.

[3 : 37] He said he was not able to identify the murderer. The prosecutor repeatedly questioned the man, were you working on the night of the murder?

He said, yes, I was working on that night. Did you see the murder take place up close and personal? He said, yes, I saw the murder.

I saw everything occur. He said, did you see the murderer's face? Did you get a good look at him? He said, yes, I saw the murderer's face.

But eventually, in the barrage of repeated questions, he blurted out, I'm very sorry, but I cannot identify the murderer. You see, to me, all you Englishmen look alike.

In a similar way, there's to be something about every Christian that makes all of us look alike.

[4 : 41] Not a race or nationality, not the way we dress, not the things we say, although we say some of the silliest things like, bless your pea-picking heart or something like that.

Certainly not the fish decal on the back of our cars. There's to be something about all of us that makes all of us look alike, and it is that we're following Christ and walking in the way of the cross.

In chapter 1, the apostle Paul taught us that the cross overturns all value systems in the world. The cross says no one gains acceptance before God by their wisdom, by their riches, by their might, by any other thing.

The cross says the only real line in the world is not between the haves and the have-not, or the who's-who and the who's-not. The only real line in the world is between those who are perishing and those who are being saved, and those who are being saved are being saved through Christ and Him crucified.

But he pushes down in these verses to make clear that the cross is not just a message we proclaim. It is an aroma that we proclaim, an aroma unto death or an aroma unto life.

[6 : 01] But nor is the cross an emblem to be displayed in our churches, along our highways in Tennessee, or hung around our necks, or tattooed on our bodies. No, the cross is to be a way of life.

The Christian life is to be a cruciform life. That's where the apostle Paul turns in these verses.

These verses are some of the most raw and urgent verses in this whole letter. They are, without a doubt, the high point of these first four chapters.

You might have thought, 1 Corinthians 1, you know, not many of you are wise or noble or whatever. When you were called, that's not the high point of the argument he's making. They may be one of the high points in the whole letter.

But Paul is saying here only what our Lord said repeatedly. If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me.

[7 : 07] As Dietrich Bonhoeffer said years ago, the cross is laid on every Christian. When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.

That's exactly what Dietrich Bonhoeffer did in one of the Nazi Germany prison camps. These verses urge us to examine our lives.

In the first steps of faith, we're eager to deny ourselves and take up our cross. But these verses urge us to ask, does our Christianity still have a cross?

In our culture geared around self-fulfillment with our handheld self-fulfillment devices, always at hand, eager to meet our needs every moment, is there room for self-denial?

Now, obviously, the self-denial in the Christian life is not an end to life, but it's beginning. There's a way to save your life, and it's by losing it. There's a way to gain your life, it's by giving it away.

[8 : 16] The truest best, most satisfying life, comes by dying. And so the Apostle Paul is holding this out for us to be a congregation losing their life one day at a time.

That it might be said of us, as it was said of those of old, that they love not their lives even unto death. So where we're going this morning is, Follow Christ, and at all costs do not forsake the way of the cross.

Follow Christ, and at all costs do not forsake the way of the cross. One author says two themes dominate these verses.

The Corinthians pride and Paul's humility. The Corinthians pride, Paul's humility, they're wonderfully juxtaposed, whatever, I can't say the word right now, juxtaposed.

They're just placed right next to each other so that you see them in stark contrast all throughout these verses. So first we're going to take up their pride, the delusion of pride. That's our first point, the delusion of pride.

[9 : 21] The Corinthians think they're so impressive. But it's a mirage. It's a show. It's a fake. In fact, in verse 6, Paul essentially says, All that I have been saying to you so far is to help you see the delusion of pride.

Pride is not merely unbecoming or annoying. Pride is wrong-headed. It's mistaken. It's a delusion.

And as we've covered several times, the Corinthians were all about status and significance.

You remember back in verse 1, they said, I follow Paul. I follow Apollos. They were kind of attaching themselves to the influences of the day. And that's the way we see the influences of this day. You know, everybody wants to be seen with them, known by them, hang around them, hang around them or something like that.

But Paul says, Leaders are not like that in the church of the Lord Jesus Christ. They're not superstars. He's walked through these verses, chapter 3 and 4.

He walked through. He said, Leaders are just field hands in the field of the Lord. Later, he says, Leaders are just workers building up.

[10:29] They're masons. That's who they fit with. Building up the temple of God. They're servants. That's who he said. Taylor reminded us several weeks ago. They're servants of God. And now he brings his argument to a close.

Look in verse 6 by saying, I've applied all these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit. So what he's done in those chapters was not merely so they would know how to think about him, but that they would know how to think about themselves.

That you might learn by us. All that he's been saying is to help us learn. And what does he want us to learn? Look down there back at verse 6.

That none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against the other. That rivalry and arrogance that we saw at the beginning. Now, puffed up is not a reference to the poof of a fashionable dress here. Or the bulge of an infected wound. Puffed up is a reference to pride. It occurs six times in the book of 1 Corinthians.

[11:38] Three times in this chapter. It's an onomatopoeia. It's a word that sounds like what it means. Pseo. It's the inflating of a bicycle tire.

He's saying pride is like that. It's the inflation of hot air. So Paul is bringing this correction. I find this so striking.

That in the midst of all the things he's pointed out. Their division. Their rivalries. Their jealousy. Their strife. He's bringing it into clothes and saying. All those things are not mainly my concern. But the pride underneath.

The arrogance. The puffed up heart. In many ways, the greatest danger for any follower of Christ is always pride. John Stott once said.

At every stage of our Christian development. Very exhaustive phrase. At every stage of our Christian development. In every sphere of our Christian discipleship.

[12:38] Pride is our greatest enemy. And humility. Our greatest friend. Pride is. C.S. Lewis once said. Pride is the anti-God state of mind.

Pride at its base. Is just turned inward on itself. Filled with self-focus. Self-sufficiency. Self-satisfaction. Self-exaltation.

And there's nothing God hates more than pride. And so the Apostle Paul is identifying what's at root behind all this. Then he follows it with these questions to puncture the pride.

In their lives. And in ours. Look what he says. These are amazing questions. Searching questions. Who sees anything different in you? In the 1800s. There was a fragment. A fragment found.

[13:38] From the first century. Talking about the Corinthians. And it was. There was other people. Other cities. Talking about the Corinthians. They were saying. The Corinthians think they are so cool. They're so sophisticated.

They're so Roman. Now that's a modern translation. Right? But they're just so hip. So everything. But Paul says. I don't see anything.

Exceptional. In you. Everyone who looks at you. Doesn't find anything impressive. Who sees anything different in you?

We've already been taught this. The only thing that makes us different. Is the grace of God. Not many of us were wise. Or strong. Or impressive. According to our birth. When we were called. None of us came to understand the things of God. Apart from the spirit of God. And so. The apostle Paul is alerting us. To let the hot air of self-importance drain out.

[14:37] There's nothing exceptional. About us. There's nothing exceptional. About our birth. Or our background.

Or our degrees. Or our business. Or our possessions. There's nothing about you. That makes you exceptional. Compared to anyone else.

There's nothing exceptional. Even about you. If I could hit close to home. Your children. I think it's so funny. That when we talk about our kids. We may talk about other kids being average.

But ours are never average. They're brilliant. The problem is. If all of our kids are brilliant. Then there's no average. Anymore. You know. That's why we put on the bumper sticker.

Proud parent of honor roll kid. My parents never had that. When I was in high school. Proud parent of D minus kid. You know. There's nothing.

[15:38] What I mean. Nothing exceptional. There's nothing. That ultimately attracts. God's eye. About you. And makes you more impressive.

Than anyone else. But the proud think they're. Impressive. One of the most searching. Descriptions of pride. All throughout the scriptures. Is someone who's wise.

In their own eyes. The proud person. Thinks they have nothing to learn. They're hard to persuade. Hard to convince. Hard to work with.

You ever work with a proud person? If you want to grow in humility. Ask a friend today. If you knew I wouldn't get angry. That's a great clause. To begin. A searching question.

If you knew I wouldn't get angry. Would you say. I'm easy to work with. Easy to persuade. The proud person.

[16:34] And I put myself in that category. Absolutely. You know. Has all sorts of inner prosecuting attorneys. Come out immediately. So defensive. So assured. J.C.

Ryle says. More narrowly. Pride never reigns anywhere. More powerfully. Than in the heart of a young man. How does pride reign. In the heart of a young man. They have nothing to learn.

They resent their mom's opinion. I know. I know. I know. I got this. Like Rehoboam. They mock the older men's guidance.

But pride's not just a young man's game. As we grow older. We begin to think that maturity means we have. We shouldn't have need for help from anyone.

And so we isolate ourselves. We're self-sufficient. That's what he's getting at.

[17:32] Instead we should be humble. He continues. What do you have that you haven't received? The answer is nothing. The only thing that makes us different is the grace of God.

And all that we received is from the grace of God. What do you have that you hadn't received? And immediately we should be thinking about. From him you have received righteousness.

Sanctification and redemption.

Because of him you're in Christ Jesus. From him you have received the spirit. Who's freely given you all the things of God. But the application goes still further.

A person biblically minded knows that life is all gift. All of it. We should all be like Jacob.

One of my favorite stories in the Bible. Jacob you know. He came out of the womb trying to steal. You know like man. At least get your feet on the ground first.

[18:31] You know. He comes out trying to steal. That's the story of his life. He's a cheating liar stealing grasper taker. That is his story. The only crook worse than him is his father-in-law.

Lavin who's crook of all crooks. And then suddenly though his story which fills the book of Genesis. He suddenly changed. He gets all these things.

He gets a wife. Gets two women actually. Which we learned about at Easter. And he comes back. He's about to face his brother Esau. He says these words.

These are amazing. I am not worthy of the least of all the deeds of steadfast love. And all the faithfulness that you have shown to your servant.

For with only my staff I crossed this Jordan. If you remember that. He was on the run. He laid his head on a rock.

[19:29] That's when he saw the ladder. And now I have become two camps. How good is that? See saving grace is meant to retrain our hearts.

To realize that life is all gift. That everything good we have received. Is an undeserved gift of God. Lewis Allen says in his book to preachers.

He says what do we deserve from God? Nothing. Would you answer it that way? What do we deserve from God? Nothing. Nothing. All our gifts.

All that we have is by grace. A sense of entitlement. Which is just on the shelves in this country. A sense of entitlement feeds a greedy heart. But a keen awareness that we deserve nothing.

But have all of God's love. And Christ will humble us and satisfy us. Then all the gifts in our lives. People. Circumstances. Privileges. Will be seen for what they are.

[20:29] Stunning blessings of God. To be counted up. And treasured with thanksgiving. That is wisdom. These verses call us. In many ways.

These verses call us to a posture of unbounded gratitude. You know so often I think we begin to do gratitude. And it's so constricted. We have a hard time thinking of what are we grateful for. It's so hard to think of it.

Really all of it. All of it. All of it. All day long. It's just an avalanche of gratefulness. Do you know the joy that is unspeakable?

It's a gift. Do you know the comfort of the spirit? It's a gift of God. Do you have a friend who sticks closer than a brother?

You got one of those in your life? That's a gift of God. Do you have a mom or dad who tried to provide for you? Or actively trying to provide for you? It's a gift of God. Do you have a family that loves you?

[21 : 26] It's the gift of God. Are you good at anything? You know we say he's a natural. No! He's been endowed by the creator. He's been gifted by God.

It's the gift of God. Anything you're good at. You're good with numbers. You're good with a baseball bat. You know what are you good at? It's the gift of God. Not so you're puffed up your heart and mine.

Do you have a house? A job? A food in the cupboards? What do you have that you haven't received? And the scripture would say nothing. I remember years ago we bought a house. And we have bought two now. Separate times. You know. But the first one. We bought this house. And you know we had. We didn't have a kid yet. But we bought this house.

It was like four bedrooms. And I remember like sitting in one of the bedrooms. Because man. When we got married. We were living on support. I paid \$8,000 I think. Living on support on the campus.

[22 : 27] Campus of UT. And God blessed us. He gave us a job. Gave us money to buy a house. And I'm sitting in that house. Just thinking. Lord. There's no way we're in a house.

This can't be true. It's the gift of God. The idea of the Christian life. Is never to move on from that feeling.

That amazement. That blown away feeling. That God has done it. So what makes you any different? Who sees anything different in you?

What do you have that you haven't received? And if you've received it. He continues. Why do you boast as if you haven't received it? Well that's meant to be the checkmate. I have no good reason for boasting about anything I've received.

I'm done. I'm an idiot. I give up. Help me Lord. Help me. Chain. Pride makes you think you have all you need. Pride makes you think all that you have is the work of your hands.

[23 : 26] But it's a delusion. They put people in psych wards for less than that. God gave the gift. That's what he's saying. Don't drink the tonic.

It's God who gives good gifts. He continues. So the delusion of pride. The reality of humility. The reality of humility.

The proud person looks impressive. But it's all a mirage. It's a delusion. It's all passing away. The humble person sees things as they are. Really the humble person sees things upside down. That's what I've titled this message.

I see things upside down. That's what you should after we're done. I see things upside down. The contrast between the Corinthians pride and Paul's humility is brought into sharp focus in these verses.

These verses are dripping with irony and sarcasm. So if you're into sarcasm. It's all right here. Maybe that's your divine permission. You know. Paul contrasts the way they are with the way they should be.

[24 : 27] So he's contrasting the way they are with the way they should be. And the way they think he is. The way they think he should be with the way he is. So these contrasts the way they are with the way they should be.

And the way they think he should be with the way he is. And these verses loaded down. Verse 8 includes three sarcastic statements about the way they think they are.

Verse 10 includes three ironic contrasts between the way they are and the way Paul is. Verses 12 to 13 include three stunning statements about the way Paul is.

And if that weren't enough, it all hangs on a metaphor that would have been very vivid to that Roman city of Quorum. So after puncturing their inflated self-assessment, Paul cuts right to the chase.

He says, you have trouble being humble. You have trouble being thankful. Because look down there in verse 8. Already you have all that you want. That's the word satiated.

[25 : 30] So already you're full and satisfied. Already you have everything you want. Already you have become rich. Already you have become kings. It's all sarcasm and hyperbole.

He's saying you're satisfied. You're self-sufficient. You think you have it all, but you're deluded and dumb biblically.

Spiritually something is way off. These verses don't resonate with the Beatitudes we just read.

Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, not the satisfied. The spiritually rich are not who you think they are. That's the way they think of themselves. But look at the way the Apostle Paul thinks of himself.

Look down there with me if you can. Verse 9. He says, for I think that God has exhibited us apostles as last of all like men sentenced to death because we have become a spectacle to the world, to angels, and to men.

[26 : 34] The image, the metaphor here is drawn from a triumphal procession of the Roman armies.

Now it's common in America when a team wins a championship to close up the downtown streets and ride through on a parade and celebrate, drink champagne, something like that.

Well, it's common in Rome when they would extend the territories or have a massive military triumph to come into the city of Rome for a massive celebration.

And Corinth, as we talked about, is repopulated, refounded by Rome. Rome, it's a Roman city that Paul's writing to in these days, so this would have been very vivid.

So this spectacle, you know, these Roman processions had over 300 times are recorded in history. And so it was a very, very orderly processional.

[27 : 35] The triumphant one would wait outside the city until it was all organized. And so the head or the senior military people would come first and they would kind of march into the city.

Then the junior ones, you know, would come after them. Then the trumpeters would come, marching into the city. Then the people carrying sacrifices would come into the city.

And then would come the flute players and all these different peoples. Finally, in the very back was the military general, the one who was triumphant. And as he was going, everybody was saying, Hail, triumphant one!

Hail, triumphant one! Hail, triumphant one! And behind him were the captives, the slaves.

Eating up everyone's deaths. And they were often taken into the Colosseum to fight the gladiators unto their death. While all the people in Rome sat and watched.

[28 : 39] Like we do at UFC, you know? Watch. Somebody fight. So where's Paul, though? Think about this. So this is the metaphor.

And I'll point it in the text in a moment. Where's Paul? Where's Apollos? Surely, Christ is the triumphant one.

If we're making the metaphor work. But where are his followers? Well, they're part of the show. You see that in verse 9. God has exhibited.

So that's a word talking about the public display of this. So he also says it's a spectacle. Again, pointing out they're involved in the spectacle of this.

But Paul is not among the military generals in the front or the trumpeters or any of them. Paul is saying, I am among the slaves. You see that.

[29 : 37] He says, last of all. The very end of the processional. The same image is used in 2 Corinthians 2, if you remember. Like men sentenced to death.

Like slaves going into the Colosseum to fight the gladiators unto their death. The irony appears to know no bounds. What Paul is kind of saying is, while you are fat and happy, rich, sitting on your couch, drinking Mai Tais, deciding whether to clap in the Colosseum, I'm in the arena fighting for my life.

It's just so incredible what Paul is doing here. He's juxtaposing what he is doing with his life and what they think the Christian life is all about.

The health and wealth and ease and status. He's saying he's fighting it all. And the truth is, we are all, if we're truly following Christ, in the arena.

One of the greatest stumbling blocks for many Christians is they fail to realize what time it is. It's not the time for health and wealth and prosperity.

[30 : 53] It's not the time for fulfillment. As this world defines it. It's not the time for ease.

That's the way the New Testament talks. You know, you can almost read it so much that you don't see it anymore. Don't think it's strange when the fiery trial comes upon you. So something, or when

the trial comes upon you, don't think it's strange?

As though something strange was happening to you? Paul doubles down after this with three contrasts.

Look down there in verse 10. We are fools for Christ's sake, but you are wise in Christ. We are weak, but you are strong.

You are in honor, but we in disrepute. This is reverse psychology. Even more than that, this is shock therapy. Paul is desperately trying to help them see the absurdity of what they are thinking when they align themselves with certain people, when they're puffed up with pride.

[31 : 58] It's so absurd. They think they're wiser than the apostles who are laying down their lives. Then Paul continues in verse 11.

To the present hour we hunger and thirst. We're poorly dressed and buffeted and homeless, and we labor, working with all our hands. You have all that you want, but we are hungry and thirsty. You are rich, but we are poorly dressed and beaten.

You are kings, but we are homeless. Our resumes list out our successes. Paul's resumes, again and again in the New Testament, list out his hardships.

He faced physical deprivation and suffering that's simply astounding. And he catalogs. It's madness.

It's the ravings of a madman. Unless it's the key to life. What's the meaning? What he's saying is the meaning is the Christian life is an utterly foolish life.

[33 : 01] By the world's standards. When you demonstrate that your first allegiance is to Christ, you will look like a fool.

When teens refuse gossip and slander and premarital sex, you will look like a fool. When you refuse to go along with water cooler crudeness or hallway slander or the misuse of company funds, you will look like a fool.

When you obey the scriptures, even when it goes against what you want, you will look like a fool.

You'll sound like a fool. When you make fixed commitments to God and his church, you will look like a fool.

When you give away 10, 20, or even more percent of your income, instead of buying more things, you will look like a fool. And when you continue to praise God, even though it feels like he's taken everything away from you, you will look like a fool.

The Christian life's a foolish life. This room is filled with fools for Christ. But these verses, well, they're not very encouraging.

[34 : 15] They're meant to be shock therapy. Are you a fool for Christ? Some people, I remember talking to somebody a couple months ago.

He's like, you know, it's kind of like, everybody's just got to figure out how to hold their stuff together. You know, and if you hold your stuff together, then you're commendable in this culture or something like that.

You know, and so he's kind of saying that about that. And I was like, no, no, Christianity didn't just help me hold my stuff together. You know, Christianity has changed everything. Because if it's just holding your stuff together, then you can go to shrink for that or AA or something like that.

But Christianity has changed everything. All the values of my life. Are you living a wise life according to the world's standards?

Or is your life foolish? If it's a wise life, it may not be the life of Christ because they hated him and ran him up a pole.

[35 : 33] It's meant to help us see your precious verses. Paul concludes this section with three stunning statements about the way Paul is.

When reviled, we bless. When persecuted, we endure. When slandered, we entreat. He's saying, I'm not responding the way you guys are responding. But he keeps going further down.

He says, we have become and still are like the scum of the world. The refuse of all things. What are we meant to see? And I think this is crystal clear as I was studying. What is Paul trying to say?

He's not ultimately trying to get them to think about him. He's trying to elicit to them that he is following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ. It is Christ who called us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

Who said, Father, forgive them for they know not what they do from the cross. And so he's the one who was run up on a pole. He was crucified for our sin and for our transgressions.

[36 : 32] And so what's the reality behind taking up your cross, loving not your life, seeking not your own interests, sitting loose with your money and possessions, throwing your life into the cause of Christ?

What is it? It's the life of Christ. Finally, the way of the cross. So the delusion of pride, the reality of humility, the way of the cross.

Now, these verses give you whiplash because the tone suddenly changes.

The biting irony is suddenly replaced with warm affection. He's letting you know that that biting irony was not meant to leave them condemned, but to alert them, to rescue them.

In the same way that you wouldn't whisper to your kid if he went over to a hot oven or a hot stove-eye, you wouldn't whisper to him, say, hey, would you consider pulling your hand away from the stove-eye?

[37 : 34] No, you'd yell at him. So that's what he's doing in these verses. Then now he's turning and reminding them and saying, this is why I'm saying this. After exposing the delusion of pride, unveiling the reality of humility, he turns and invites them on the way of the cross.

Look down there in verse 14. I write these things to admonish you as my beloved children. If you've been with us the past several chapters, we've learned a lot. He said that the church is a field. The leaders are like field hands in the field. The Lord is the Lord of the harvest over the field. He's the one who calls us all to grow. Then he says the church is like a building, you know. It's the same metaphor that's used in 1 Peter 2 and other places.

It's like a spiritual household being built up, a spiritual temple. Now he says the church is a family. All the warmth and affection of family are here.

He says, I urge you then, as a father, to be imitators of me.

[38 : 55] See that in verse 16. I urge you then, be imitators of me. That word urging, the first appearance of that urge that all of you agree. And 110.

Now he's closing this section with that same word to bracket it. Because he's urging them, not merely that they would agree, but that they would imitate the way of the cross. Imitate me. Imitate me. This command comes off unusual, even offensive to 21st century ears. The word literally means mimic. Watch my life.

Mimic it. Mime it out. Follow what I'm doing. We don't want anything to do with that. You know, we're our own people. We've got to share our own truth.

We've got to live it. But there's something incredible here. He's saying the Christian life is entrance into a spiritual family where we learn to walk in the way of the cross.

[39 : 54] In the footsteps of spiritual fathers and mothers and brothers and sisters. It's amazing.

Like, you just think about this. It's like, this language of familial language explodes into the New Testament.

Out of nowhere. I urge younger women to follow older women.

Urge younger men to follow older men. Treat women as sisters. Treat men as brothers. Love one another with brotherly affection.

Where does all this come from? There's one father. There's one father. And one family. There's a common bloodline. It's not a bloodline of natural descent.

[41 : 05] But through Christ. And so the church becomes a spiritual family. It's incredible when it comes into work, you know. And even a church like ours.

You begin to think of the joy of being. It's a wonderful thing to be a father. But what God's doing in the church is even more wonderful, actually.

The privilege of being a father, a mother, a brother, a sister. Beyond. And I think the Baptists get this right because they call me Brother Walt every time I go around him. But there's so much more here to begin to think.

Man, my life is not about this nuclear family. God, marriage. I mean, God, family, guns or something like that. My life is about the family of God. It's amazing.

And it's amazing. So self-denial is the key to life. It's the way of the cross. It's so fascinating that Paul kind of points out their delusion.

[42 : 06] Points out their lack of humility. And then he says, I urge you, come into this new life. Because self-denial is not an end. It's the beginning. It's the key to life.

It's the way to the family. It is the family trait. And it is the way to your greatest joy and delight. Now, I read this quote by Jonathan Edwards this week.

It may be a little tedious. But it was so helpful for me. Because self-denial, we often think, is the enemy of joy. But biblically, self-denial is the pathway to it.

Edwards said, if you are selfish and make yourself and your own private interests your idol, God will leave you to yourself. And let you promote your own interest as well as you can.

That's not what you want. But if you do not selfishly seek your own, but do seek the things that are Jesus Christ and the things of your fellow human beings, then God will make your interest and happiness his own charge.

[43 : 22] And get this. And he's infinitely more able to provide for and promote it than you are. The resources of the universe, after all, move at his bidding.

And he can easily command all to subserve your welfare. But he continues because he's making his point very carefully. So that, not to seek your own interests in the selfish sense, is the best way to seeking your own interests in the better sense.

It is the directest course you can take to secure your highest happiness. That gets it what Paul is doing here.

Saying self-denial is entrance into this family. Seek not to own your own interests. It's the way of the cross. It's what he's taught everywhere and in every church. Follow Christ and at all costs, do not forsake the way of the cross.

My prayer is that as, prayer for us, is that this would be what makes all of us look alike. We're all a bit different.

[44 : 35] Tall, short, head full of hair, bald people. But I pray this is what makes us all look alike.

We press into one another's lives. We find the same familiar aches, familiar lines and wrinkles, familiar anxieties, familiar sacrifice.

But as we press into one another's lives as well, we should see the same familiar joys, familiar comforts, familiar stories of deliverance and provision, of familiar resemblance, family resemblance. May God help us. Father in heaven, we thank you for these words that lay out for us the Christian life.

God, I pray that all of us would be rescued from the delusion of pride, of making ourselves and our interest foremost and primary.

deliver us, God, unto the way of the cross, the way to life, the upside-down life, we pray. But we feel these aches and pains and ways that we're willing to admit and the ways that only you know.

[46 : 03] I pray you keep us and hold us, we pray. Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. You've been listening to a message given by Walt Alexander, lead pastor of Trinity Grace Church in Athens, Tennessee.

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