

Christian Maniacs

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"I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." (Galatians 2:20)

In Chi Alpha, we speak often of fundamentals. We believe a Christian's outward life is a direct result of the way he or she thinks. The main issues center around the internal parts of our lives, and the external is always a result of the internal. Therefore, we are very concerned with ideas we embrace as Christians. One fundamental principal of Christianity is selflessness. The true Christian is a man or woman who is dead to self and alive to Christ. We will try to pursue this idea of being dead to self and alive to Christ by looking at the concept of Lordship.

Christian Maniacs

Humanism is a philosophy that puts it's ultimate faith in mankind - saying that man is his own master, the determiner of his own destiny - to the exclusion of God. This is a very man-centered philosophy. We as Christians would reject this idea, at least on paper.

However, if we take a close look at our own lives and the church, we will see how often we embrace humanism in practice. The church has been so influenced by the man- centered (or self-centered) thinking of the world that we have imported this mindset into our Theology. Winkie Pratney has called the man centeredness of the church an Evangelical Humanism, or a Christian Humanism. He speaks of a church that is man- centered in motive, manner and message.

As we study this idea, we need to be brutally honest with ourselves about our own theology. The fundamental question we need to ask ourselves is "why do you do the things you do, and who do you do them for?" God is a God of motive. He is concerned not with outward appearances, but the reality of who we are on the inside. The answer to this question will reveal to us what Francis Shaeffer called our true integration point. There is a great difference in participating in "Christian" activities out of a true love for God and our neighbor versus out of a selfish desire to advance our own person.

G.K. Chesterton, in his book *Orthodoxy*, has a chapter titled "The Maniac." In it, he opens with a conversation he had with his publisher while walking down the street. The publisher, noticing an acquaintance from the business world passing on the street says, "That man will get on in life (succeed), simply because he really believes in himself." Chesterton, with his usual sense of sarcasm, replies:

"Shall I tell you where the men are who believe most in themselves? For I can tell you. I know of men who believe in themselves more colossally than Napoleon or Caesar. I know where flames the fixed star of certainty and success. I can guide you to the thrones of the Super-men. The men who really believe in themselves are all in lunatic asylums."

He goes on to explain the mental position of the man we say is a paranoid schizophrenic. He sees a person on the park bench sitting and reading a newspaper, apparently unconcerned about those who are passing by. But our friend knows this person is not really reading the newspaper, it is only a disguise. This person is really watching him. He also sees the woman on the cell phone, but he knows she is not really having a leisurely conversation. She is speaking to someone about him! In fact, everyone he passes on the street is involved in this plot to capture him.

Chesterton again says:

"Are there no other stories in the world except yours; and are all men busy with your business? Suppose we grant the details; perhaps when the man in the street did not seem to see you it was only his cunning; perhaps when the policeman asked you your name it was only because he knew it already. But how much happier you would be if you only knew that these people cared nothing about you! How much larger your life would be if your self could become smaller in it."

We call this person a maniac, simply because it is lunacy to think that the whole world revolves around you!

In the light of this principal, I would like to introduce to you what I would call Christian maniacs – Christians who really do believe everything revolves, or at least should revolve, around them. We see this self-centeredness in everything – in motive, manner and message. Our theology reflects it.

We read the bible with this in mind; that every promise, whether Old or New Testament, was meant for me personally. We never give consideration to a corporate interpretation, only that this is meant for me and me alone. Our motives reveal it; so often I only obey God so I will be blessed by God. We choose our church body on the basis of "What's in it for me?" If I like the preacher, I'll come back. If the worship suits MY style, I'll come back. I'll keep coming as long as I am being fed.

Our messages from the pulpit verify our self-centered religion. Preachers say over and over again things like, "God is here to meet your needs this morning." We hear sermon titles such as: "How to unlock YOUR potential", "How to unleash YOUR heavenly blessing", or "How to enlarge YOUR territory." Just this past week I heard an extremely popular preacher give a message entitled "Thanksgiving, the key to YOUR victory." This coordinated with the Thanksgiving holiday, so it seemingly had relevance to the audience.

But it is easy to see the point of selfishness we have come to when we can take the one day that, more than any other, should be God-centered, and make even Thanksgiving about us.

The point is that Man is still the center of the church. I am still the center of my life. I keep Me as the integration point. Everything is filtered through how it affects Me. I am still looking out for number one. This is what I call the Christian maniac, and what Pratney calls Evangelical Humanism. Where is the practice of the Lordship of Christ?

Making Jesus Lord

"... if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:9)

A simple word study on the word "Lord" shows that salvation is more than a confession of the mouth. From Strongs' Greek Dictionary, we learn that this word kurios (koo'-ree-os) has the literal meaning of a "supreme in authority, or a controller". This is translated in the Bible as God, Lord, or even master. The idea of having another as the supreme in authority, or a master and controller of our lives, is repulsive to the natural man. But as we will see, Jesus demands to be Lord and Savior, not just Savior.

An easy definition of this concept of Lordship is to have God as the integration point of our lives. When we speak of integration point, we mean the thing that everything in our lives revolves around. We mean also, the thing by which all other things are filtered. Our integration point is the ultimate meaning in our lives, the thing that holds everything else together. Humanism has taught us to place man as the integration point. Our sinful nature, which is essentially selfishness, has taught us specifically to place our own individual person as our integration point.

People once thought that the earth was the center of our solar system – that everything revolved around us. We have since learned that we actually revolve around the sun! We must see that we as finite creatures cannot sustain our world. Simply put, we are not big enough, strong enough or wise enough. Only the infinite God is capable of being the true integration point. This is where we run into trouble. We try to be the integration point – we try to be God. Then, because we are incapable, the whole thing collapses. The greatest thing we can know as a Christian (and when I say know – I mean know not only on paper, but in practice) is that God is God, and I am not. This means, practically speaking, that everything revolves around Him. Everything in our lives is centered on and filtered through how it affects Him and His kingdom. We have died to self! I no longer live, but Christ lives in me!

I said before that Jesus demands Lordship. If you will, remember the story from the Bible of the Rich Young Ruler (Matt 19 / Luke 18). This young man, who had mostly everything this world has to offer (power, youth, wealth, etc...), came to Jesus with a question. He asked, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" After a brief conversation concerning the commandments, in which the man asserts his attempts at religion, Jesus tells him he lacks one very essential thing. Jesus commands him to go and sell all that he has, give the money to the poor, and come follow Him. The Bible tells us at this, the man went away sad, for he had great wealth.

The point of this story, as it relates to our discussion of Lordship, is that this young man wanted salvation without lordship – but Jesus wouldn't lower His standards. He came looking for a savior, but he already had his lord. And if the truth is told, his lord wasn't money, it was himself. He wouldn't let go of his selfishness, and trust the lordship of his life to Jesus Christ. Jesus did him a favor by calling him to the highest standard, that of absolute surrender to Himself. Too many preachers do people a disservice today by lowering the standards and offering a "fire insurance" form of Christianity, that says you can make Jesus your Savior while holding on to the Lordship of your life. Jesus will have none of it. He will be Lord or he will be Judge.

You will remember also from Mark 8:34-36, Jesus is speaking with not only His disciples, but other followers as well, within the context of His coming death.

"Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul?" (Mark 8:34-36)

The Denying of Self spoken of here is not an occasional "not getting what one wants". Jesus is speaking of taking up a cross. The cross meant only one thing then, and only one thing now – death! He speaks here also of losing one's life. This is no isolated theme in Jesus' teaching. He continually speaks of dying to self, crucifying self, burying self, etc... The man who tries to hold on to his life will forfeit it in the end.

God has a Fundamental Right on our Lives!

Now let's deal with part of the "Why" behind this demand of God to be the center. Is it just vanity on His part, or are there legitimate reasons why He make this demand? There are numerous reasons that come to mind immediately.

The first and most obvious reason that God has a fundamental right to rule our lives is that He is our creator. I will not try to prove this to the unbeliever, but state it as a given for those of us who call ourselves Christian. As the creator, God has a right to the ownership of His creatures.

"The earth is the LORD's, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it; for he founded it upon the seas and established it upon the waters." (Ps 24:1-2)

Even more central to our discussion here though is the fact that as Redeemer, He owns us! 1 Corinthians 7:23 says, "You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men." In Romans 14:8, Paul says, "If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. So, whether we live or die, we belong to the Lord." Again, in

speaking of the return of Jesus, Paul says in 1 Corinthians 15:23 that He is coming back for those "...who belong to Him." Peter testifies to the same principal. In 1 Peter 1:18-19, he reminds believers that they were redeemed with the "precious blood of Christ." The bible is clear. If you are a Christian, you are not your own, you have been bought at a price, and you belong to Him!

Furthermore, we have already mentioned our own inadequacies compared to God's adequacy. Simply put, he has a right to rule because He is most qualified. In any situation, logic would lead us to choose the one most qualified to lead. Surely when we consider God's omnipotence, omniscience, and the host of other characteristics of the infinite God, we will gladly choose Him as Lord and master of our lives.

As we move on, you might be thinking that releasing lordship of your life to another is a scary thing. This is true for most people at first. It is only scary to the degree that you do not know Him. As your understanding of Who God Is increases, your fear of relinquishing lordship of your life to Him will decrease dramatically.

The more you understand Who He Is, the more you will trust Him. Now, there are two types of people that embrace this idea of Lordship. First are those who fearfully or reluctantly submit. These we will only mention in passing, but they are always characterized by legalism and never joy. Secondly, there are those who joyfully submit control of their lives to God. This is the principal of selflessness at work. These are those who are dead to self and alive to Christ on the inside. These are the ones who understand this next very important principal:

God's right on our lives is founded upon His Value / Worth!

"The kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field. When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant looking for fine pearls. When he found one of great value, he went away and sold everything he had and bought it." (Matthew 13:44-46)

There is much to be gained from a careful study of this parable, with many details that we will not consider. However, the main point Jesus was trying to communicate with this story, and the one of the great pearl immediately following, is that of the overwhelming value of the treasure. This man seems to have almost stumbled on to the treasure in the field, while the merchant had been searching all his life for the pearl. Both men, however, immediately recognize the great value of their "find." Notice that the man who found the treasure did not reluctantly sell everything he owned. He sold everything with joy! The point is that the treasure is so obviously more valuable that it is easy to lose all his other possessions.

So he sells everything with joy and seemingly without a second thought. Is this your story? The treasure, ultimately, is the presence of God in your life. His kingdom

means He is Lord, and you are in your rightful place as the creature. However, as the creature, if you have been redeemed, your rightful place is with Him! Have you found His presence and Lordship in your life to be the most valuable thing in the world? Have you seen His beauty and fallen in love with Him – for who He is rather than for what He can do for you?

Questions:

1. What is a Christian maniac as Eli describes it?
2. What does your life look like if all you focus on is Jesus as Savior and not Lord?
What about Lord and not Savior?
3. What scares you most about surrendering all of your life to Christ's rule, making him your integration point?
4. Who could you begin to talk to about that area of your life that is difficult to hand over to God?