

**TITLE: FOLLOW THE SAVIOUR: THERE ARE NO SUPERSTARS**

**INTRODUCTION**

We live in a world where celebrity culture is the norm. We celebrate people's achievements in entertainment, sports, music, etc. We are in a generation of 'influencers' on social media who influence how we think, what we eat, how we dress, etc. This way of the world is however in contrast to how we, who are part of the Church of Jesus Christ should live. Paul addresses this celebrity culture in the Corinthian Church. He draws attention to the contrast between the Kingdom of God and the kingdom of the world, God's wisdom, and the wisdom of the world. God rarely calls those who may be seen as 'superstars' in our eyes. Rather, He calls the unlikely, the unimpressive, the unworthy, the unloved, etc so that no one can boast except in their Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor 1:31). In this study we examine the issue of celebrity culture in the Corinthian church, Paul's cure for this issue and the parallels with the church today. We examine how to deal with the negative pull of personality worship rather than the worship of Jesus in the church.

**KEY TEXT – 1 Cor 1:26-31**

**A. THE ISSUE/DIAGNOSIS:** Celebrity Culture/Superstar worship which caused division.

1 Cor 1:11-12 (NIV)

*"<sup>11</sup> My brothers and sisters, some from Chloe's household have informed me that there are quarrels among you. <sup>12</sup> What I mean is this: One of you says, "**I follow Paul**"; another, "**I follow Apollos**"; another, "**I follow Cephas**"; still another, "**I follow Christ**."*

The issue was that the Corinthian church was suffering from the disease of 'superstar worship'. They were idolising the leaders who had taught them – Paul, Apollos, Cephas, rather than following Christ. This is like the celebrity culture in our world today.

**B. THE CURE** – Understanding that God's kingdom is different from the kingdom of the world. God builds His kingdom by choosing the most unlikely people to serve him.

**i. God Calls the Unlikely – 1 Cor 1:26**

*“<sup>26</sup> Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were **wise by human standards**; not many were **influential**; not many were **of noble birth**.”*

Paul says not many of them would be considered “wise by human standards”. Today, we could say, not many of them were ‘Oxbridge’ or ‘Russell Group’ educated. God does not require us to have a PhD degree in order to be chosen by him. Not many of them were ‘influential’. We see that riches could make it difficult for people to get into the kingdom of God – Matt 19:24. Not many of them were of “noble birth”. In Paul’s day the elite group would include the Sanhedrin in the nation of Israel. For the Romans it would include the patricians or aristocrats of Roman society. Today, we could say, not many of them were from ‘the royal family’ or from elite society. These privileged groups could be proud and think they did not need a saviour and certainly not someone who died on a cross!

**ii. God Chooses the Unimpressive – 1 Cor 1:27 - 29**

*‘<sup>27</sup> But **God chose the foolish things** of the world to shame the wise; **God chose the weak things** of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> **God chose the lowly things** of this world and the **despised things**—and the **things that are not**—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no **one may boast before him**.’*

The kingdom of God is rooted in the choices that God himself has made. Our salvation is not rooted in the will of man but in the divine will and purpose of God. God chooses the ‘foolish’, the ‘weak’, the ‘insignificant’, the ‘despised’ and the ‘nobodies’ so that no one would be able to boast before him.

**iii. God Changes the Unworthy – 1 Cor 1:30-31**

*“<sup>30</sup> **It is because of him** that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become **for us wisdom from God**—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”*

Paul adds that all they have has come through Jesus Christ. God hates pride and does not want us to boast in anything we have or in anyone other than in God himself (v 31). Through Christ we have:

- I. Wisdom – God’s Wisdom Delivers us from Sin’s perspective (1:30)
- II. Righteousness – Righteousness delivers us from Sin’s penalty (1:30).
- III. Sanctification – Delivers us from Sin’s Power (1:30)
- IV. Redemption – Delivers us from Sin’s presence (1:30)
- V. Boasting in the Lord – This delivers us from Sin’s Pride (1:31) (Akin & Merritt, 2023)

### **C. APPLICATION TO US TODAY**

Like the Corinthian church, the church of Jesus Christ today also suffers from the disease of ‘celebrity worship’ or ‘superstar’ culture. Beatley notes that ‘a toxic celebrity culture has infiltrated the church’ (Beatley, 2022). When we are more focused on personalities rather than Jesus, we are living like the Corinthian church. There are several dangers that arise from a celebrity culture which make it a dangerous practice for the church:

- Worship of men instead of worship of God
- No accountability/weak accountability structure
- Covering up sin, abuse, mismanagement of funds, breaking of the law, etc
- Bad witness to the world

There is always a temptation to elevate people because of their gifting, success, appearance, wealth, etc. However, we must guard against this practice as it displeases God. The remedy for this just like it was for the church in Corinth is to remember that our focus should be on Jesus. We are to fix our eyes on Jesus – Hebrews 12:1-2.

### **CONCLUSION**

God’s church is just that – His church. Christ is the head of the church, it is His body, and He is jealous for His church. We must resist the temptation to elevate ourselves or others rather than elevating Christ. A good antidote to pride is to remember Jesus’ example in Philippians 2:5-11. God’s ‘foolishness’ became our wisdom; His loss became our gain and Jesus’s crucifixion became our salvation. Let us therefore only boast in the Lord.

### **DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:**

1. The Corinthian church was suffering from the disease of ‘celebrity/superstar worship’. In what ways do we see a similar culture in the church today?

- a. Can there be a conflict between ‘honouring our leaders’ and the ‘superstar’/ ‘celebrity’ culture? If yes, how can we reconcile this?
  - b. How can we reconcile the principle of ‘imitation’ in discipleship with the ‘superstar’ culture?
2. “Christian celebrity is an oxymoron, with dire consequences for the church”.
- a. Do you agree with the above statement? What are some of those ‘dire consequences for the church’?
  - b. What are some practical ways we can guard against the superstar culture?
3. Since God calls the foolish, weak, insignificant in the world, should Christians ever aspire to fame or political power? How might achieving such things begin to lead believers toward pride? In what ways have Christians used personal influence for good?
4. What is God saying to you today and what are you going to do about it?
5. Who can you tell what you have learned here over the next week?

**MEMORY VERSE:**

**1 Corinthians 1:31 (NIV)** – Therefore, as it is written: “Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord.”

**References**

- Akin D. L and Merritt J, *Christ-Centered Exposition: Exalting Jesus in 1 Corinthians* (B & H Publishing Group, Tennessee, 2023)
- Swindoll C. R, *Swindoll’s Living Insights: New Testament Commentary 1 & 2 Corinthians* (Tyndale House Publishers, Illinois, 2017)
- Beatley K, ‘A Toxic Celebrity Culture Has Infiltrated the Church and We Must Root it Out’ (Premier Christianity, 29 July 2022)  
<https://www.premierchristianity.com/features/a-toxic-celebrity-culture-has-infiltrated-the-church-we-must-root-it-out/13506.article>