

Unmasking the Self

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We all wear masks. We can't see them, can't feel them, but we see *through* them. Sometimes we know they're there, and other times we don't. After calling the church to godliness (1-4), giving examples of godliness (5-9), Paul turns to expose the masks that prevent godliness (10-16): *Identifying* the mask, *Removing* the mask, *Replacing* the mask.

Identifying the Mask

The church is slipping on masks handed to them from their culture. We know this because Paul quotes a cultural authority to get his point across, "[Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons](#)" (12). It's a saying coined by one of their own philosophers centuries before, Epimenides. What does it mean? When we say *Keep Austin Weird* we don't mean *everyone* is weird; we mean there's enough weirdness to shape the culture of the city. What was shaping Crete? Lying, laziness, and pleasure. *To cretize* was slang for "lying," and the church was absorbing it. Paul writes, [For there are many who are insubordinate, empty talkers and deceivers, especially those of the circumcision party](#) (10). One of the masks they were wearing was **insubordination**. An insubordinate is someone who *refuses to submit to authority*. Now, if the authority is evil, it can be good to be insubordinate. The women who bravely stood up to Hollywood mogul Harvey Weinstein. *But in this case* the authority is good, unimpeachably good—the trustworthy Word of God. *Sound* doctrine. But *unsound*—insubordinate—thinking has gotten into the hearts and minds the church. Now, we're all practice insubordination and subordination. The interesting thing about it is that if you're insubordinate to one thing, you're subordinate to another. If a group of insubordinate people rise up against the ideals of the government, it's because they are subordinate to another set of ideals. We all submit to something. Even if you reject *all* authority, you do so by privileging *your own authority*. We all fall into this, privileging the autonomous self. You don't have to be flamboyant. You can appear meek and mild. How so? The autonomous self says: whatever I think, whatever I feel, whatever I want, I have a right to. I define reality. And I'll *cretize* to keep it. So I tell my kids they have 30 minutes of tech time. 45 minutes goes by and I haven't seen them. So I call up to them to ask what they're doing. They say O, nothing. Then I find out they're still playing. What happened? They were

insubordinate, rejected Mom and Dad's authority for their own authority. Why? They *felt* like it. Their feelings so influenced them they were willing to create a false reality. O nothing. To slip on a mask that says: I am in charge. Or let's say you hear a biblical truth that challenges something you feel strongly about. And hearing it you immediately launch into a series of mental defenses, justifications (empty talk: means to chase tangential things instead of pursuing the truth). You may even run down the truth in City Group, lose your cool. **The sin most destructive in our lives right now is the sin we're most defensive about.** TK Where do you find yourself critical, guarded, easily offended? There's your sin. Our first impulse when we're wrong is to keep the mask on. To hide. It can be painful to take it off, but it's worth it. As theologian Kevin Vanhoozer says: **Sin is the hypocrisy of pretending to be autonomous.** And when we pretend to be in charge, we live a long way from the face of God. Our dark mask and its thick layers hide our face. St. Augustine loved to wear masks. He recalls a time when he was performing and won more praise than anyone else on the stage because he was *emoting as the character demanded*. He prided himself on eloquent and persuasive speech, but underneath it all he longed for praise, attention, flattery. Looking back he says, **to live in the murk of emotion is to live a long way from your face."** When the feelings of the self, not the truths of God, dictate our actions, we live a long way from the face of God.

Removing the Mask

How then, can we remove the mask? Paul gives us two ways: correction and instruction, *rebuke* and doctrine (13). **Rebuke.** It's not enough just to tell someone the truth when they're deceived. You have to show the lie. Were you *really* doing nothing? *What* are you most defensive about? An alcoholic once told me he denied being an alcoholic for years until one day he stood over the recycle bin and noticed it was full of *beer cans*. He saw the lie up close. To remove the mask, we have to see it, name it. Paul quotes their own philosophers, summarizes their destructive teaching, shows them what's false. We have to identify *the mask*. Paul says the liars must be *silenced*. Word means to muzzle. May seem aggressive. Why? **They are upsetting whole families by teaching for shameful gain what they ought not to teach** (11). For us, the word upset can mean a mild ruffling of the feathers, but the meaning here is stronger: it means *to cause internal ruin, to jeopardize*

one's faith. And it's not just families; the word is actually used for house churches. Their trying to pull down these communities of Christ to get a paycheck or a following. They're enamored with power and influence willing to upset entire churches. It's not uncharitable to call out ruinous teaching, to challenge false doctrine; it's actually truly charitable to rebuke and silence it. Second way to pull off the mask is through teaching **sound doctrine**, *Therefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith*" (13). See the point isn't to humiliate but to heal. Correction is for instruction. Rebuke for producing a sound faith. The term "sound" is *hygiano*. We get *hygiene* or healthy from it. To have a sound faith is to have a healthy, robust, vibrant faith. And that comes through sound, healthy, true doctrine. If correction holds up a mirror, revealing the mask, then doctrine pries the mask revealing Christ. Correction confronts; instruction calls. Sound doctrine exposes us to the face of the Father. Reflecting further on his distance from God, Augustine recalls the story of the prodigal son who received an early inheritance from his father and squandered it all. He comments, *you were a kind father in conferring inheritance on him, but an even kinder father when he returned to you needy*. A kind Father is calling us this morning. Will you take off your mask, name your sins, renounce the insubordinate Self, and run to the Savior? Kindness is calling you. It is his kindness that leads us to repentance. It takes us by the hand and leads us to the face of God. And that's what the prodigal did. Remembering his father one day, he came to his senses, he took off his mask, and ran home *needy*. Blessed are the *poor in spirit* for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. The kingdom of kindness is available to all, but we must come *needy*. Not pretending but penniless, not fist-clenched but empty-handed, mask thrown to the side, so we take in the glory of our Father's kindness. A kindness that exudes from the face of Jesus. When the truths of God, not the feelings of self, dictate our actions, we live close to the face of Christ. Coram Deo. Before the face of God.

Replacing the Mask

We've identified the mask of the autonomous self, removed the mask through correction and instruction, and now replacing the mask. Paul says, *To the pure all things are pure*. Now what does he mean? There was a false purity circulating that said purity is based on what you do and what you don't do. Read your Bible; don't read your Bible. What you touch or didn't touch. Paul's essentially saying, if you're operating on a pure heart through faith in



Jesus, then you don't need to measure your purity based on outward action but on the inward work of Christ. In legalism, purity is determined by what you do, but in Christ, purity is something done to you. Titus 3 says we're washed and regenerated by the Holy Spirit through faith in Jesus (4-6). And as a result, he says, devote yourselves to good works, Things that are excellent and profitable. So read your Bible, go to church, give to the poor, *but do so not to become pure but because you are pure in Christ.* TO the pure all things are pure. A pure heart is a heart that stays close to Christ, to the face of the Father, and therefore avoids impure things. So, let's identify our masks, throw off our masks, and replace our masks by gazing into the face of Christ and living close to him. When the truths of God, not the feelings of self, dictate our actions, we live close to the face of God.