

# **LOVE IS SELFLESS**

## **1 Corinthians 13:5**

**Sermon for Peace Church**

**October 26, 2008**

**PURPOSE** - To call people to love selflessly – in the power of God – expressed in courtesy and temperance.

**MAIN IDEA** – Because love is not self-seeking, it is not rude or easily angered – like God’s love which is “slow to anger”.

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### **I. INTRODUCTION**

Let’s open our Bibles to 1 Corinthians 13. *READ*

- Today’s focus: Verse 5 – “Love is not rude, self-seeking, easily angered”  
= the self-less-ness of love

1. In 1986, Whitney Houston came out with a MEGA-HIT – “The Greatest Love of All”.  
- Topped the charts ... # 1 best seller – some of you remember it?

I believe the children are our are future  
Teach them well and let them lead the way  
Show them all the beauty they possess inside  
Give them a sense of pride to make it easier *////*  
Let the children's laughter remind us how we used to be  
Everybody searching for a hero  
People need someone to look up to  
I never found anyone who fulfill my needs  
A lonely place to be  
So I learned to depend on me

Chorus:

I decided long ago, never to walk in anyone's shadows  
If I fail, if I succeed  
At least I'll live as I believe  
No matter what they take from me  
They can't take away my dignity  
... Because the greatest love of all

**Is happening to me**

**I found the greatest love of all**

**Inside of me**

**The greatest love of all**

**Is easy to achieve**

**Learning to love yourself**

**It is the greatest love of all**

(i) That song RESONATED DEEPLY in culture.

In fact, it led Christians to reexamine Jesus' famous words which summarized all of God's laws thus: *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, soul, mind & strength. Love your neighbor as yourself. On these 2 commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets*

"Actually", some Christian circles were saying, "Jesus was not giving us 2 commandments, but THREE – love God, love your neighbor, love yourself

... cause you can't love God ... and you can't love others – if you don't love yourself!"

... you can't love others if you hate yourself ... so the greatest love of all has to be SELF

(ii) What do we make of that?

- and how do we reconcile that with Jesus' other words – *"If anyone would come after me, let him DENY his SELF and follow me ... For whoever LOSES his life for my sake will find it."*

2. First, let's be clear about this: JESUS WAS NOT GIVING 3 COMMANDMENTS in love.

... just 2 – summarizing the first half and second half of the law: Love God, love others.

(i) So when he said to love others AS YOURSELVES, he was not telling us to "love / seek ourselves".

He was ASSUMING that we already do that. BY NATURE, we're self-concerned, even self-preoccupied, and quite self-centered.

Our fall from God has left us that way. By nature, the ENERGY of our soul gravitates around the self.

= we think about ourselves, we look after ourselves, we do what we think is best for ourselves (even if it may not be!).

A. Even that person who hates their self! Notice where their spiritual energy is. It's in thinking about their self- who they WISH they would be, how they WISH their life would be – He's yet self-focused.

Tragically, some in this condition even commit suicide – That is a confused, self-centered act. Where's love for family in that act? Where's love for the poor & needy? Where's love for God? It's ABSENT.

Such a person does not need to love themselves MORE. They need to begin to love others.

A. So when Jesus says to love others are yourself, He is NAMING that self-centered energy that BURNS in us! He's stating that the law commands us to take that same energy and give it to God & others.

... LOVE IS NOT SELF-SEEKING

3. Does that mean that I can never do things for myself?

Not at all – because we have to TAKE CARE of the self – so that we can give it to others for Love's sake.

I.e. - Vacations are OK. I've had people say to me: "I'm heading out of town for a while ... time for me to be a little selfish.... = vacation time!"

(i) But as Christians we NEVER want to act selfish. Never – selfishness is sin!

Does that mean no vacation?

No! Cause the Bible calls us to TAKE CARE of our self – so that we CAN give up our self FOR LOVE'S SAKE.

I.e. – If we're burnt out serving others, a commitment to love means that we find time for rest & renewal – so that we can give ourselves to God & others.

A. A plumber with a BROKEN ARM who LIVES to plumb – serves that vision best by RESTING his arm till its healed ... and then keeps it in good shape thereafter.

WE DON'T LOVE THE SELF. WE CARE FOR THE SELF.

(ii) So the person who HATES their SELF so much that he has NO CONFIDENCE to go up to another person – to meet and get to know them, be interested, learn of need, encourage, bless – that person does NEED TO CARE for their self!

- God does not call us to an isolated life. He calls us to LOVE.
- If that self has been damaged, they need to bring that self to God for healing

4. Let's never lose clarity on this because we live in a day & culture which is EXTREMELY SELF – INDULGENT.

Self matters ... SELF is VALUED ... BELIEVE in your SELF ... We WORSHIP the self in our day.

(But we don't put faith in the self ... we believe in the Savior)

LOVE IS NOT SELF SEEKING

## 5. OTHER TRANSLATIONS OF THIS PHRASE:

- Love does not “SEEK ITS OWN” ... it’s own things / rights
- Love does not “insist on its own way”

Love is Frank Sinatra singing: ... “WE DID IT YOUR WAY!”?

- It’s not self-seeking

## II. DOORMATS?

But does that leave us as DOOR-MATS? Do we ever ASSERT the self? Is it always “your way”?

2. I DID SOME Google Research on the story Ralph read for us. Ever since its publication in 1964, there’s been some controversy about “The Giving Tree”.

- Is this a tale of unconditional love and generosity ... = a selflessness which is reciprocated when the boy returns late in life to the tree for a rest?

Or, in the words of some reviewers, is this a book ... *portraying a vicious, one-sided relationship between the tree and the boy – with the tree as the selfless giver and the boy as a greedy and never-satisfied being who constantly receives, yet never gives anything back to the tree; a selfish love that could be misrepresented and imitated by child readers.*

*Is the tree an irresponsible parent whose self-sacrifice has left the boy ill-equipped to cope and make his way in the world -and so led to him ending up alone, hopelessly co-dependent.*

(i) Of course, that’s reading way too much into this book. It’s beauty is in its simple portrayal of selfless love. But THOSE ARE QUESTIONS we ask in the life of love: If the tree did discern that the boy was becoming selfishly dependent, it would NOT BE LOVE to continue to give, would it?! It would be feeding a bad habit!

I.e. - Like giving that candy to the child who is throwing a temper tantrum about it!

That’s more self-seeking than self-giving – because you’re ruining the child for the sake or removing your embarrassment at the grocery store!

A. Selflessness in love is not always a straightforward matter. Love is concerned for the best in others.

3. In his book, “The Road Less Travelled” (which is one of the very BEST books on love you can ever read), Scott Peck takes this a little deeper.

In a chapter on self-sacrifice, he describes a minister ... **READ p. 111-112**

... But does he? Is that love?

***Read next section***

(i) Can you see that?

HOW SELFLESS REALLY WAS HIS LOVE?

It was largely serving an image of himself – that was a response to his emotional needs stemming from earlier in life!

4. Love is not self-seeking IN DEEP WAYS!

Love is concerned for the other person FOR GOD’S SAKE (outline)

Therefore we must learn to love others in TRUTH

... as we’ll pick this up later in this series: *“LOVE REJOICES WITH THE TRUTH!”*

**III. LOVE IS NOT RUDE & EASILY ANGERED**

Those are DEEP CONSIDERATIONS in the selflessness of love (matters that take much prayer).

Let me shift to some more IMMEDIATE APPLICATIONS in the other 2 phrases we’re looking at.

1. LOVE IS NOT RUDE.

Because it is selfless, it does not “behave badly” toward others – that’s the root meaning of the word – “to act indecently, dishonorably”. KJV – “Love is not UNSEEMLY”

J.B. Philips paraphrases: “Love has GOOD MANNERS”

(i) So love does not pollute the environment. Love does not litter. It is not RUDE. It doesn’t talk aloud in a movie theater. Love doesn’t answer & use cell phones while in conversation at the dinner table.

Love doesn't text-message while in the presence of others. Love doesn't write on bathroom walls. Love doesn't assault others through crude jokes. Love doesn't slur others. Love doesn't degrade others with immodest photos. It does not belch in public. Love does not look away when another person is approaching you.

Love has GOOD MANNERS. Love tips generously. Love is appreciative of what others do for you. Love learns table-etiquette. Love does not begin to eat until the hostess is seated. Love does not begin dessert until all have been served.

Love is not RUDE! It is COURTEOUS!

Those are all issues of love – because they are issues of VALUING others, even when you're hungry & want to eat, or tempted to pick up your cell phone.

PARENTS – train your children in etiquette! (book)

## 2. Love too is not EASILY-ANGERED!

= quick to take offense / irritable / easily provoked / touchy

- A loving person should not have others around them feeling as if they're always walking on EGG-SHELLS

(i) This too is an application of selflessness – because at the root of a lot of anger is simply an IDEA – or FANTASY – of the way things “ought to be” (AS I SEE IT!).

A. People should act this or that way ... and when they don't ... I get angry!

- I.e. – they should be READY at the check-out counter, with their cash in hand. Why do they wait to be told what the cost is BEFORE they pull out their wallet out of their purse? Did they think they wouldn't need it?
  - o Besides, why are they talking so much to the cashier? This is not a social gathering!

### LOVE IS NOT EASILY-ANGERED

(ii) We develop inflamed egos – and around them visions of the way life SHOULD be. So inconveniences become IRRITATING and we are EASILY-ANGERED (because we're self-centered).

(iii) In other cases, we're so EMOTIONALLY HURTING in the self, because of rejections we've experienced in life – that when people don't act the way we want them to, we get quickly angered – cause we're looking for them to meet deep needs within – needs that we must first bring to God. Let Him become real in them. Let him move others to minister to that need – in His way & time. If we don't do that, we're easily-angered because in deep ways we NEED them to act a certain way toward us.

LOVE IS NOT QUICK TO TAKE OFFENSE – because love has submitted the self to God!

- And like God, who is "slow to anger" (Ps. 103), love becomes less easily-angered.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

I trust that again this morning you can see how DESPERATELY & DEEPLY we need God to become people who grow in love.

1. We need His Spirit's discernment to show us the subtle ways our love is yet stained by self-centeredness.
2. We need His healing to purify our motives
3. We need His wisdom to know HOW TO BEST LOVE others – for their sake
4. We need the joy of His presence in the center of our life, lest we become self-centered and easily angered.
5. We need a passion to value others so that our love is well-mannered, not rude.

The GOOD NEWS is that God is glad to make Himself available to us in all these ways – in SPIRIT & TRUTH.

In Jesus Christ, He is wisdom, He is love. He is present.

And those who worship Him must worship in spirit & truth.

That's why ... WHOEVER LIVES IN LOVE LIVES IN GOD – for God is love (1 Jn. 4:16)

And WE CAN LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVES US!

AMEN!