

July 24, 2011

Love is not Rude, Selfish or Easily Angered

1 Corinthians 13:5

BI: In all things the loving person resolves to be more concerned about the needs and feelings of others than his own.

In the beginning God created man in His own image and commanded them to be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth and subdue it. I believe one of the implications of this is that we were created to make a significant contribution to the world around us. We want our lives to count for something. It's in our blood. It's part of who we are. We all want to make a difference.

The book of 1 Corinthians is an interesting study in how to really make a mess of this calling. The Corinthian believers got it all wrong. But Paul is trying to set things right by helping these misguided brothers repent and become a significant force in Asia Minor for the gospel of Christ.

If you are like me, you would have never pointed someone to 1 Cor. 13 to help them learn how to make an impact on the world for God, but that's why Paul wrote it. And the striking thing about Paul's approach is how different it is from the world's approach to becoming people of influence. The world say that if you want to influence the world around you, you need to have great natural talent, or you need to go to school and get an impressive degree, or you need to invent something or come up with some new approach to self-help, or write a best-seller, or be a star athlete or accomplish something great in some specialized field. But that is not Paul's approach, because it's not God's approach.

The Corinthian church was divided and fractured on many fronts because each person was living by the world's approach to greatness. Each one was seeking to make a name for himself. That's why there was such confusion and conflict there. But Paul is showing us a "more excellent way."

As we have seen, the more excellent way is the way of love. God's means of making a great impact on the world and on the church for the glory of God is the way of love. It is learning to live in such a way that is constantly on the lookout for *how I can give to others whatever it is they need that I have because God wants me to*. This is what love is all about. And Paul describes it here in 15 very practical terms.

We have considered the first five characteristics of love and today I want to look at a few more. So let's look at the next one. If you're taking notes, this is number six.

VI. Love Does Not Act Unbecomingly:

1. Now the word for "unbecomingly" could just as easily be translated "rude." Love is not rude, or it does not act a disgracefully, or contrary to established standards of proper conduct and decency.

2. Clearly this would include words that are spoken in such a way that any decent person would consider rude. For example, most of you children would get in trouble with your parents if they heard you telling one of your siblings to “shut up.” It’s not as though the phrase “shut up” is intrinsically immoral. It’s just rude! Likewise, you are probably not permitted to call your brother or sister “stupid.” The fact is, the term “stupid” is in the Bible many times and is therefore not inherently immoral. The problem is that calling another person “stupid” is just plain rude, and as followers of Christ we are not permitted to act in such an unbecoming manner. It is a poor reflection on the glory of Christ.

3. But meaning of the term “unbecoming” or “rude,” however, does not find its limits within the realm of verbal communication. We can behave disgracefully in a variety of ways. It may be inappropriate dress... disregard for other people’s time or moral conscience. Taking advantage of people, tactlessness, ignoring the contributions and ideas of others, running roughshod over other’s plans and interests, inappropriate behavior with the opposite sex, and a general disregard for proper social conduct” (from Strauch, *Leading with Love*, p. 59).

4. These are all evidences of lack of love for other people. And this is what we see in the church of Corinth. For example, 1 Cor. 11:21-33, the rich members of the church would come to the place where the Lord’s Supper was to be observed and eat most the food prepared for the fellowship before anyone else could get there. The poor, who often arrived late, would find little left over and were forced to go away hungry. That’s rude!

5. On other occasions, members used their so-called superior theological understanding to trample the consciences of their weaker brothers by eating food sacrificed to idols (1 Cor. 8). During public services, some of the more gifted speakers would monopolize the time which hindered others from using their gifts in the church. Others would apparently interrupt when another was speaking. Still others spoke out loud in tongues without an interpreter simply to impress others even though no one really understood what was being said.

6. Rudeness can come in all kinds of different forms. In one church where I was preaching one brother who was sitting about half way back from the pulpit clearly disagreed with what I was saying. And while that is not a problem in itself, he would express his disagreement with exaggerated hand movements and facial expressions that were clearly being done so I could see them. That’s rude!

7. But this is *NOT* the way loving people act. Alexander Strauch writes: “Loving people are considerate of how their behavior affects others, even in little things. Those who are possessed of God’s love are sensitive to proper social relationships, public decency, social convention, politeness, tact, and proper conduct in dress, speech, and action.”

8. Are table manners important? To a loving person, Yes! Is dressing appropriately to social events (weddings, funerals, banquets, and graduations) important? To a loving person, Yes! Is how I dress when I preach in various cultures important? If I’m a loving person, Yes! And

frankly, as western society becomes more coarse and thoughtless about basic standards of decency, loving people stand out like lights in the darkness.

9. Many of you know the story of Hudson Taylor. You may not remember a lot about his life, but you probably remember that when he went to China, he chose to break with English conventions and adopted the dress, hair-style and culture of the Chinese people he sought to win to Christ. I have met many young men entering ministry over the years who have been greatly inspired by men like Hudson Taylor, but who sometimes seem completely oblivious and even resistant to the basic conventions of their own culture! A loving person will not act like this. He will make it his ambition to become all things to all men so that he might win some... even in his own home town.

10. Again, Strach writes, "Following the more excellent way of love means being keenly aware of what is considered tactful and polite" (Ibid p. 62) with other people in every situation. It means resolving to change any practices or habits you have that annoy other people.

11. Love does not act unbecomingly.

VII. Love Does Not Seek Its Own.

1. Paul addresses this issue head-on when he writes in Philippians 2, "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."

2. Someone reported reading an inscription on a tombstone in a small English village that read,

Here lies a miser who lived for himself
And cared for nothing but gathering wealth.
Now where he is or how he fares,
Nobody knows and nobody cares!

In contrast, (John MacArthur writes), a plain tombstone in the courtyard at St. Paul's Cathedral in London reads, "Sacred to the memory of General Charles George Gordon, who at all times and everywhere gave his strength to the weak, his substance to the poor, his sympathy to the suffering, his heart to God" (1 Corinthians, MacArthur, p. 344)

3. Selfishness is at the heart of all the other forms of unlove that Paul is speaking of. The reason that we become impatient, unkind, and jealous; the reason we brag, become arrogant, and act rudely toward others is because we are inherently selfish. What we seek is not the welfare of others, but our own good. We are preoccupied with self.

4. If we are going to become a loving people we simply must break the grip of selfishness. We must strive to live like our Lord who “did not come to be served, but to serve and to give His life a ransom for many” (Mark 10:45).

5. Barnabas is an excellent example of a life of love. He was *NOT* a self-oriented Christian leader. Luke tells us in Acts 11, that he was “a good man, full of the Holy Spirit and of faith” (11:24). The first time we hear about Barnabas in the Bible he is selling some of his own property in order to raise funds to meet the needs of the poor. In other words, he was committed to giving what he had that they needed because God wanted him to.

6. Later on, we find Barnabas sharing his leadership position with Paul. You may remember that the Barnabas was chosen by the church in Jerusalem to go as their first missionary to Antioch where the Lord was doing some wonderful and unexpected things among the gentiles. But rather than go alone, Barnabas traveled far out of his way to track down Paul in the city of Tarsus to invite him to join him in ministry. I suspect Barnabas knew that Paul’s teaching gifts far exceeded his own, but that didn’t keep him from doing what he thought was best for the believers in Antioch.

7. Barnabas was not jealous or arrogant. He was not out to establish his own glory. He lifted others up and put their interests above his own. He gave himself for the benefit of others. I suspect that’s why people referred to him as “son of encouragement” (Acts 4:26; 11:23).

8. I have personally been the beneficiary of such selflessness. Years ago when I was a young associate pastor here at Calvary, Pastor Jim Pittman kept encouraging me to develop my gifts. He frequently allowed me to preach and teach in his place so that I could have opportunities to grow and change. Then, after nearly six years of ministry together, I concluded that the Lord wanted me to find my own church in which to serve. Amazingly, however, after four months of unsuccessfully looking for an opportunity, Pastor Jim came and offered to leave in my place so that I could stay here and preach where I was already at home. I will never get over that selfless act of kindness. Chris and I are grateful for the fact that Jim loved us and the Lord’s church and did not seek his own.

9. Beloved, I believe one of the most significant reasons Calvary is what it is today is because Pastor Jim loved this church and will willing to sacrifice much of himself for our welfare.

10. We need to learn this, beloved. Even you children, now is the time to learn to not to relate to others in a selfish manner. Parents, we need to model this and be resolved to teach this to our children while they are young. Selfishness is not cute or silly. It is sin no matter what the age.

11. The Scriptures say that children are like arrows in the hands of a warrior. But I think that our arrows will be of little use to the church and the world of they are not sharpened—often against their will - by vigilant instruction designed to drive their bent toward selfishness far from them. A selfish man us a danger to his family and the church. A selfish woman is a disgrace. Beloved,

if we are going to make an impact on the world for God, we need to learn to be self-less. We must learn to put the interests of others ahead of our own.

12. This leads us to the next characteristic of love.

VIII. Love is Not Provoked:

1. I think the KJV says, “is not easily provoked.” In other words, the loving person is not easily angered. As Paul has already said, he is “long suffering.”

2. Let me just take a minute to share with you the anatomy of an easily provoked heart.

A. It starts with desire. You simply desire for someone to do something for you. There’s nothing wrong with that. But what happens when that desire is not readily fulfilled?

B. Desire turns to Demand

C. Demand gets expressed as Need (Lust)

D. Need turns to Expectation

E. Expectation results in Disappointment

F. Disappointment results in any number of Sin

- * Complaining
- * Self-centered accusations against the offender
- * Anger, fighting, pious sounding, ungodly emails

G. Sin breaks fellowship and causes disunity.

3. Beloved, this is not the way of love. This is not putting the interests of others above our own. This is anger rooted in selfish. And it chips away at our homes and our churches every day. And the only cure for it is the gospel of Jesus Christ which offers the power of forgiveness and the ability to love.

4. This is the kind of love that makes an impact on the world.

5. This week, Brent read me a blog article that I think fits perfectly with what we are learning from 1 Cor. 13. Stephen Altrogee posted a short article this week called “Being radical for Jesus is Boring. In the time that remains, I think we would do well to be encouraged by his words.

How exactly do I be a radical Christian? I've been thinking a lot about that lately. This matters a lot to me. In Revelation Jesus says that he spits out lukewarm people, and I certainly don't want to be a lukewarm Christian. I want to be a red hot Christian who is on fire for Jesus.

So should I sell everything I have and be a traveling evangelist? Should I go immediately into the mission field? Should I give 75% of my income away? Should I read my Bible all the time and not watch TV or play video games? Well, maybe. But not necessarily. The more I read the Bible, the more I'm convinced that being radical for Jesus is actually pretty "boring" and "mundane".

The book of Ephesians is a helpful example in this regard. In the first three chapters of the book, Paul details the incredible, brilliant, mind-blowing plan of salvation that God has devised and put into action through Jesus Christ. I mean, we're talking serious stuff here: election, predestination, adoption, redemption, and the grand plan to unite all things in Jesus Christ. This is explosive, "set your heart on fire for Jesus" kind of stuff.

Then, in chapter 4, verse 1, he says: "I therefore, a prisoner for the Lord, urge you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling to which you have been called..." When I read that I think, "Alright, here it comes. The call to be radical and to live in a manner worthy of the gospel. Lay it on me Paul. Hit me in the face with it!"

And Paul does hit me right in the face. He tells me to walk, "...with all humility and gentleness, with patience, bearing with one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace." Hold on. What? That's what it means to be radical? To bear with one another in love and maintain unity? That seems so, I don't know, boring. Maybe if I read farther in the book I'll get to the really radical stuff. Ephesians 4:22-24 says:

"...put off your old self, which belongs to your former manner of life and is corrupt through deceitful desires, and to be renewed in the spirit of your minds, and to put on the new self, created after the likeness of God in true righteousness and holiness."

These passages, and a lot of others like them, seem to be saying that the Christian life is, **by nature**, radical! In other words, when I love my wife and serve her, that is radical. When I put off corrupt speech and speak the truth in love, that is radical. When I flee sexual immorality, that is radical. When I serve others in my church with the gifts that God has given me, that's radical. When my wife Jen serves me and our girls by doing laundry and making dinner, that is radical. What seems kind of boring and mundane is actually very radical in God's eyes.

Don't get me wrong, I'm not saying that we shouldn't think about missions, or giving away a lot of money, or adopting children, or whatever. Those are all important things. I just wouldn't want someone to think that they are not a radical Christian if they don't do those particular things. Being radical is a lot bigger than that.

13. I think this is exactly what Paul wished to communicate in 1 Cor. 13. Do you want to make an impact on the world and on your church? Then do something radical! Learn to love.