

Love is not rude nor selfish
July 12, 2009 - 1 Corinthians 13

What is the greatest gift you can give to someone else? I hope that looking back on your life, you can remember very meaningful gifts given to you by others. I've brought a few gifts I've received over the years.

- Stone in the shape of an egg.
- Scroll saw cross
- 1952 Saskatchewan license plate from my Dad

Now all of these things are significant to me. If you can think of some meaningful gifts you've received, you probably appreciate the person who gave it to you. But what about giving to others? Maybe you can think of gifts you've given that have been received with great joy and appreciation.

If we're Christians, I believe the greatest gift we can give to another person is God's Gospel through Jesus Christ. If we can be used by God to introduce another person to the possibility of reconciliation with God, forgiveness for their sins, eternal life with Christ and the joy of walking with Christ every day, that is the ultimate gift.

But sometimes, obstacles exist that lessen the gift giving joy. An absentee father might come home to give his children new bikes. Though they might appreciate the gift, they can sniff out if this is simply an attempt to buy them off. The gift is more about making the Dad feel better than for the kids. Or there might be an obstacle within the relationship between the giver and receiver of the gift. Maybe the giver was really mean to the receiver just before the receiver's party. Then the gift giver turns around half an hour later without apologizing to give a gift at a birthday party. The receiver might physically take the gift but emotionally experience turmoil. "How can you yell at me and then give me a gift?"

We can hinder people's receptiveness to Christ and the Gospel by unloving behavior. We can place obstacles in our relationships that can damage their openness to Christ in their lives. So we might want to show them Christ's love and invite them to receive Christ's love. But our unloving behavior can put them in the same position as that person who was yelled at and then given a gift.

To show Christ's love to others, we must battle against unloving behavior. Today we are talking about two types of behavior that can

greatly damage relationships and hinder people's receptiveness to the Gospel: Rudeness and Selfishness.

There was some serious rudeness and selfishness happening in the Corinthian church. It caused divisions in the church family and damaged their witness in the community. Paul addresses this in the love chapter we're studying this summer. Here he talks about rudeness and selfishness. We will also consider what a Godly replacement to those behaviors looks like. Then we will meet at the Lord's Table to remember God's greatest gift to us.

1 Corinthians 13 **The Way of Love**

13:1 If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. 3 If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant 5 or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; 6 it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. 7 Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

8 Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away. 11 When I was a child, I spoke like a child,

I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I gave up childish ways. 12 For now we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I have been fully known.

13 So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

How can we show Christ's love?

1) By replacing rudeness with respect.

Verse 5; Love is not rude. But what is rudeness? Paul uses the Greek Word "*aschemoneo*." It consists of two primary parts. The main part of the word is "schema" from which we get the word scheme. Now a scheme often refers to an evil plan. But it also can mean a systematic or orderly plan. And in English we also have the word schema. That refers to an outline or pattern. So the schema part in the word Paul uses refers to an accepted form or way of behaving or doing things.

The second key part of this word is one letter: alpha like our "a." Often, when you add an alpha to the front of a Greek word, it negates what follows. It takes what follows and turns it around to the opposite. So A-Schema is a negative form; acting opposite to an accepted form or pattern of behavior.

That's why most translators insert the word "rude" for "aschemoneo." To act rudely means to act opposite the accepted form or pattern: impolite, discourteous, bad-mannered, uncouth, offensive, foul, vulgar, boorish, and disrespectful. Notice the words used to describe rudeness often have prefixes in front of them to show the rude behaviour is opposite to an accepted pattern of behaviour. Paul writes "love is not rude." Love avoids the whole range of rudeness.

But there's a huge question that has to be answered to help us. Who gets to decide what's rude? Who gets to define the schema – the form? One hundred and thirty years ago in upper class England, if you didn't fold your napkin and place it on the table after you were finished eating, you were considered rude. Today in our culture, burping or belching after supper is something you need to excuse yourself for, unless you have elementary aged boys who love engaging in burping contests. In other cultures, if you don't burp or belch after supper, that's rude. Because expelling gas noisily from your stomach through your mouth communicates "that was a great meal." So who decides the form so we can determine whether or not something is rude?

The most important person to consider is God, the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit. Was Jesus ever rude? He was assertive in certain situations. But he never went against the form of God for His own selfish purposes. God lays out in His law the behavior which glorifies Him. He doesn't do this to be some strict disciplinarian. He does this to draw us towards all He's created us to be. Ephesians 5:1-7

¹Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children ²and live a life of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

³But among you there must not be even a hint of sexual immorality, or of any kind of impurity, or of greed, because these are improper for God's holy people. ⁴Nor should there be obscenity, foolish talk or coarse joking, which are out of place, but rather thanksgiving. ⁵For of this you can be sure: No immoral, impure or greedy person—such a man is an idolater—has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God. ⁶Let no one deceive you with empty words, for because of such things God's wrath comes on those who are disobedient. ⁷Therefore do not be partners with them.

There are some pretty clear standards there to protect us from rudeness. We might think "if anyone tells us how to live, they're restricting our freedom and independence. We have the right to be rude." Yes. But does that mean we're actually free? Does rudeness open doors or close them? Well sometimes rudeness forces open

doors. Sometimes people use rude or abusive behavior to force others to give them what they want. The rude person may get what they want. But they have alienated the other person.

The rude person says “I am willing to go outside of socially accepted boundaries and my own ordained boundaries to get what I want, say what I want or do what I want. I value what I want, say or do more than treating you with respect. So I will yell, ignore, give the silent treatment, threaten, swear, shock, invade personal space, use sarcasm or yawn at you. What I want, say or do is most important to me.”

We can be prone to this.

So we counter that tendency by soaking our minds in God’s word. Then we have something to fight back with when the invitation to rudeness comes along. So we must consider God’s standards, patterns or schema for rudeness. But we must also consider the culture of others around us. To go against form with no regard for another person is to show no love to them. How do you gain respect and a hearing in another culture? By showing some respect to their culture.

You would get nowhere in Japan if you insisted on wearing your shoes in someone’s house where everyone else took their shoes off.

This applies especially to non-Christians. If we are intent on bringing the Gospel to our non-Christian friends and neighbors, we must approach them respectfully and not rudely. We were talking about this as pastors this past week. In the past the classic way to present the faith was presenting the evidence and confronting them with their need for Christ. Certainly, that is the Holy Spirit’s job. And I am not saying that we should water down the Gospel until everyone is comfortable.

But we must consider that today immediate confrontational approach is now considered rude in much of our culture. If we do not respectfully engage in dialogue, we are likely not to ever gain a hearing. If we do not demonstrate the gospel with our lives while proclaiming it with our mouths, it might never get through. I’m not saying God cannot overcome that in someone’s heart. But He might use someone other than us to bring the message if we insist on showing no respect to a non-believer’s struggles.

Remember when we talked about reaching out with prayer and ministry to the Gay and Lesbian community? Remember the article by that one pastor who had several gay and lesbian friends? They had heard from Christians “love the sinner hate the sin.” But none of them could think of one example where a Christian actually loved them.

Love is not rude. It is respectful. Respect does not mean tolerance to the point that we agree on the lowest common denominator until everyone is comfortable. Respect means to hold convictions yet engage in gracious conversation with others about our convictions. It means we don’t sneer at other people’s convictions, we explore them. 1 Peter 3:15-16 – *“In your hearts, set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.”*

Notice Peter says “be prepared to answer.” That means they have to ask a question. That means we have to be in relationships. That means they have to somehow see the hope that we have so they

can ask about it. Love does not put obstacles in front of people preventing them from seeing Christ’s love in us. Love does not blind people to Christ through rude behavior. Instead, love respects. So we show Christ’s love by replacing rudeness with respect.

How can we show Christ’s love?

By replacing selfishness with selflessness; replacing fish with less.

1 Corinthians 13:5 again. Love is not self-seeking. It does not insist on its own way. The text literally says “love does not seek its own.” But what does that mean? A person who seeks their own believes life is all about them and puts themselves and their families first in everything with no regard for others. We are willing to help others only after we have been satisfied, the kids are happy, we are comfortable, we are played out. Then if there is a scrap of time or \$5 left for helping kids overseas, we might consider it.

The Corinthians were experts at seeking their own first. They did not share their food at church potlucks. They protected their rights to the point of suing each other in court. They wanted the best

spiritual gifts for themselves. Instead of using spiritual gifts for the benefit of others, they used them to show off.

As natural human beings, our sinful nature always tempts us to put ourselves first. Ever since the fall, instead of our self-love being ruled by divine love, our self love can run wild. It naturally goes free and unrestrained.

Just watch what happens when the gates open for a general seating concert. We were part of the Billy Graham Mission in 1998 Ottawa. It was held at the hockey arena. There was no admission price. So you had to line up and then go in. The arena would be packed an hour before the actual event began. So you had to get there early if you wanted to get inside. Well the doors would open. The line would start moving. Then these people would come off the latest bus dropped off right by the front doors. Sometimes they came off of church busses.

Did they go to the back of the line? No they tried to discreetly join the line. As you know, lots of Christians go to Billy Graham missions as well as many lost people. I wonder what lost people thought of those busloads of Christians seeking their own; butting in

line? Is it more important for us to get a better seat than to live out selflessness?

It's hard to live a selfless life when our culture tells us its all about you. But in giving ourselves for others, we actually can find the life God has for us.

That's what a lady discovered in what she thought were the last weeks of her life. She asked her chauffeur to take her to her husband's grave. The chauffeur asked the minister, the caretaker of the cemetery, to come over to the car. There the minister discovered an old lady with sunken eyes that showed years of hurt and anguish. She introduced herself and said she had been sending money to the cemetery for the past several years to be used for flowers for her husband's grave. "I have come in person today," she said, "because the doctors have given me only a few weeks to live and I wanted to see the grave for one last time."

The minister replied, "You know, I am sorry you have been sending money for those flowers." Taken aback, she said, "What do you mean?" "Well, I happen to be a part of a visiting society that visits patients in hospitals and mental institutions. They dearly love flowers.

They can see them and smell them. Flowers are therapy for them, because they are living people.” Saying nothing, she motioned the chauffeur to leave. Some months later the minister was surprised to see the same car drive up, but with the woman herself at the wheel.

She said, “At first I resented what you said to me that day when I came here for a last visit. But as I thought about it, I decided you were right. Now I personally take flowers to the hospitals. It *does* make the patients happy and it makes me happy, too. The doctors can’t figure out what made me well, but I know. I now have someone else to live for.

Jesus demonstrated the ultimate selfless love. While we were still sinners He died for us. Romans 15:2-3 state “Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. For even Christ did not please himself, but, as it is written: “The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.” Christ did not please himself but laid himself out on behalf of others. Love does not seek its own.

Selfishness must be replaced by selflessness. But selflessness does not mean self nothingness. Selfless is not self-deletion. Christian life

is like walking on a balance beam. Four inches wide. We usually err on one side. Satan tries to push to one side.

The one side in this discussion is towards the arrogant, loud, self-important person. Or we might be quieter and yet place the silent treatment card. That’s a more passive form of rudeness and selfishness. Yet they both qualify. They need to work hard at stepping back and engaging carefully in dependence on the Lord for replacement work.

Others of us might have to work on going too far the other way. We conclude that selflessness means worthlessness. No self-love is allowed. Enjoying anything for ourselves is wrong. But it is good and right to enjoy God’s blessings; to have satisfaction in what God approves. It is not wrong to enjoy accomplishment and achievement or have a healthy pride in a son or daughter as long as we recognize it comes from God and is just a taste of all His blessings. When our self-love is ruled by God’s love, it will likely be a very healthy love.

Rudeness and selfishness place obstacles between people. Respect and selflessness open doors. Through Christ and the Holy Spirit’s power, He can transform our rudeness to respect and our selfishness to

selflessness. So receive Christ if you don't know Him. Apart from Christ's salvation and the Holy Spirit we cannot kill rudeness and selfishness. Turn from sin; turn to Christ.

Then we must open our lives to the Holy Spirit to replace rudeness with respect and selfishness with selflessness - "For it is God who works in us to will and act according to His purpose." Then we might be amazed at how many doors God opens for us to give His greatest gift to others. Amen.