

Today's Sermon

Christ's Love Delivers Us From Selfishness

1 Cor 13:5a

Pastor/Elder Phil Layton, GCBC October 24, 2021

Jonathan Edwards has been called “the most influential American-born theologian”¹ and greatest *philosopher* in early America.² He was a pastor in Northampton Massachusetts in 1700s, later president of Princeton. I looked him up in the latest encyclopedia at Cameron Park Library and he's called there “the leading intellectual figure in colonial America.”³ In the last half century, scholars have written thousands of works related this 18th century Puritan, there's conferences and societies that study his works, and Edwards study centers from Yale to Australia, Belgium, Brazil, Germany, Japan, Poland, and South Africa ...”⁴ But his descendants first impacted America:

‘300 ministers, missionaries, and theological professors; 120 college professors; 110 lawyers; more than 60 physicians ... 30 judges; 14 presidents of universities; numerous [leaders] in American industry; 80 holders of major public office; 3 mayors of large cities; 3 governors of states; 3 U.S. senators ... and 1 vice president ... It is hard to imagine that anyone else has contributed more vitally to the soul of this nation’⁵

Even today twenty-somethings can sometimes be seen sporting ‘Jonathan Edwards is my homeboy’ T-shirts (Young, Restless, Reformed book cover)

TALK RESOLVED CONFERENCE, DESIRING GOD, MY OWN LIFE.

Banners on wall were what he lifted up – esp. Soli Deo Gloria, 1 Cor 10:31. His God-entranced view of all things carried on in his descendants. His tribe has increased. John Piper wrote in *God's Passion for His Glory: Living the Vision of Jonathan Edwards*, “For over 30 years I have been trying to see and savor this God-centered, soul-satisfying, sin-destroying vision” (xiii).

In the 1730s Edwards preached a series applying that vision to the glory of Christ's love in 1 Cor 13. He saw love centered on God's glory, to satisfy our souls and destroy sins in v. 4-7. It was a time of a revival that stirred a spiritual awakening in the early colonies. In a 6-month span, hundreds were converted (in a town of 1400). One communion Sunday welcomed 100 new believers into membership, another week 60, and spiritual transformations began in surrounding communities.⁶ As he preached on sin, sovereignty, and salvation, there was an awakening to “religious affections” (his term).

With the growth of the church came growing pains, use of a new building was a controversy, different opinions led to disunity and a lack of charity.

In 1738 was the only time in his ministry he preached through a *chapter* verse-by-verse (usually did different parts of Bible week to week). It seems he changed his pulpit approach because he didn't see his people changing. He saw people going back to old

ways, insisting on their own way, being arrogant, rude, impatient, unkind, etc. So he preached through 1 Cor. 13 over a series of months and it bore much fruit (book *Charity and Its Fruits*).

MENTION M.O.G., BOOK TABLE AFTER SERVICE

One writer says 'Edwards preached ... in attempts to correct the course his people were taking ... 1 Cor. 13 seemed almost tailored for the town since [v. 4-5] addressed the very vices that so conspicuously plagued the ingrown community. Departing from his usual practice of choosing texts widely to suit various sermon topics, Edwards followed the order of the verses in 1 Corinthians, spending 5 sermons working through each phrase of v. 4-5.'⁷

That's very much what the Apostle Paul was doing as he originally wrote these verses for the church in Corinth. Revival had swept through the area and there was a mighty awakening in surrounding areas, but Paul saw this church living the opposite of what he writes about Christian love in this text. This list, of what love is and what love is not, is literally tailored to the town and community to confront their vices in v. 4-5 and call for virtues of love.

I want to read v. 4-5 now of 1 Cor 13, but we'll just focus on 1st half of v. 5

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* [or one version, 'not self-seeking']

...

Edwards summed up this 1st part of v. 5 as "the opposite of a selfish spirit." He talked about sin shrinking man's heart inward, confined to itself, to the exclusion of others. But God's love in Christians enlarges and extends the heart in love to Christ and to others (defining 1 Cor 13 as love in the saved).

God used his sermons powerfully. The Great Awakening peaked and lasted into the 1740s (Enfield, Whitefield, etc.). Later on in his ministry, Edwards faced much criticism and opposition, but the love of 1 Cor 13 sustained him to his farewell sermon in 1750, where after much personal injury and unkind opinions were shared of him, he kept patiently preaching to them the themes of this chapter: 'Christians ... fervently *love all men of whatever party or opinion, and whether friendly and unkind...*'⁸ Love is patient, love is kind.

We need a great awakening today, a revival of gospel love

For Paul, some in Corinth were very unloving to him, but he was sustained to the end by God's glorious love in 1 Cor 13. He was a man of great learning, but his goal here is affections in action. Not just action because v. 3 says you can do great acts of giving, but have not love, as God defines it.

There needs to be affection for Jesus and others and the aim of 1 Cor 10:31: '*whatever you do... do it all for the glory of God.*' That's Paul's legacy that Edwards followed: a God-centered soul-satisfying sin-destroying vision. In 1 Cor 13:5 the glorious love of Christ delivers us from the sin of selfishness. This is where Paul's going with this

church in 2 Cor 5:14: *'the love of Christ compels us...that those who live should live **no longer for themselves**, but for Him who died for them and rose again.'*⁹ That's the love of 1 Cor 13:5. The love of Christ compels us not to act selfishly or live for self any longer

<p>Title: Christ's Love Delivers Us from Selfishness</p>

- | |
|--|
| <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Our Unloving Behavior 2. Our Self-Seeking Heart 3. Christ's Transforming Love |
|--|

The NT says love is the mark of the Lord's followers. This isn't the love of unbelievers; we love because the Lord first loved us. And this love in v. 5 is not rude in its behavior. NKJV love *'does not **behave** rudely, does not seek its own'* (that covers unloving behavior and self-seeking hearts behind it). In English, rude is an adjective, but in Greek this is an action verb, like in NAS *'does not **act** unbecomingly'* (or another, *'does not act improperly'*-HCSB). Love doesn't have conduct that's unbecoming an officer in the Lord's army.

Translations: *'does not **behave dishonorably**' / 'does not **dishonor** others'*¹⁰

It may be ignoring, or interrupting (guilty), not just outright insulting

Love isn't just affections, it's actions. It's not just saying 'I love you,' it's displaying honor by behavior. Speaking and feeling love are important but they're insufficient by themselves. Love isn't word only, it's deeds, 1 Jn 3.

1 Cor 13 describes love with 15 present tense habitual action verbs in v. 4-7.

Not just some nice words about love, he's correcting those who weren't being nice in how they spoke and acted with others in the congregation.

Like suing each other (ch 6), speaking over others in church (ch 14), etc.

Like being impatient, unkind, envious, boastful, arrogant (13:4)

Someone asked me this week what does 'love is kind' look like in v. 4? My answer was I think v. 5 helps with what unkind looks like. Rudeness is the opposite of kindness, it's doing things inconsiderate of others or uncaring of others. We need to consider if we're considering others, or ask how we can show care. Love is not rude, love is kind -> considerate, caring, compassion.

Loving kindness is gentle, thoughtful, helpful (rude is the opposite)

You can be rude in attitude as well as action. The Greek word meant to lack manners or not follow social standards. It's to talk or act offensively. It can include what's not in good taste, or as our British friends say, 'bad form.'

Paul later wrote to this church, *'giving no cause for offense in anything...but ...as servants of God...in patience, in kindness...in genuine love...'* (2 Cor 6:3-6 NAS). So genuine love is patient and kind, and it isn't rude/offensive.

Phil 1 prays that your love abound so you're without offense (v. 9-10 NAS).

The gospel is an offensive message but don't offend by your manner or lack.

Body language – even tone of language with your church body

In ch 8 and 10 Paul talks about not offending consciences of other Christians in areas of Christian liberty. In ch 11 women scandalously dressed like men, some men were being rude even at love feasts, or coming drunk. In ch 7 he talks about a man acting improperly towards a young virgin (same root word as rude in ch 13) and in ch 12 he uses the same root word for unpresentable body parts that need modesty, and how we need to care for others (v. 23-25). Love isn't immodest or ill-mannered. Agape doesn't act rudely (improperly, impolitely, or inappropriately). It's not inconsiderate or insensitive to others.

We all do this and aren't sensitive to it and rarely consider how we do

I'm convicted how easily with loved ones I can be thoughtless or careless.

The rude don't have to be loud. You may do silent treatment. You may do subtle verbal jabs or non-verbal looks. Sarcasm can be a weapon. Saying things to make the other person feel guilty, insinuation or manipulation, etc. We can be big offenders in our family, and offend big-time a church family.

WHAT IF YOU KNOW YOU OFFENDED SOMEONE? Matt 5:22-24.

WHAT IF YOU DON'T KNOW HOW YOU'RE OFFENSIVE? Ps 139:24.

One writer says *rude* is a 'thoughtless pursuit of the immediate wishes of the self regardless of the conventions and courtesies of interpersonal life... **Love** does not elbow its way into conversations...in a disruptive, discourteous, attention-seeking way... impose its idiosyncrasies on [others] ... 14:40 [*do all things properly and in order*] applies this to *worship*, as well as to life.'¹¹

That takes us from our unloving behavior, #1 to

#2. Our self-seeking heart

v. 5 moves from rudeness to selfishness. Unloving actions have self-seeking attitudes behind them. When the heart insists on its own way, it's insensitive to others in the way of what it wants. One translation says love '*does not act improperly, is not selfish*' (HCSB). Another says love '*is not self-serving*' (NET) or NIV '*is not self-seeking.*' Being rude is the fruit, but self-seeking is the root issue Paul moves to. ESV: love '*does not insist on its own way.*'

This confronted the self-centered ways of Corinth, but it also confronts our world where people insist others submit to their own way of self-identifying

It could be pronouns, politically correct labels, people groups (LGBT)

Burger King Christianity: 'have it your way.' Changed 2014: 'be your way'

2021 Babylon Bee ran an article of a man who insists on his own way he identifies as, the right way to speak of him by his preferred *adjectives*: 'Ted Becker never worried much about his pronouns, but [this says] people use adjectives to describe him that are not at all descriptions he identifies with ... "Here are the adjectives I identify with," Becker put on social media. "Cool, witty, handsome, innovative, fun." Please use one of these adjectives when describing me." "It distresses me when people use adjectives I don't identify as," Becker later explained. "Like 'creepy,' 'weird,' or 'off-putting.' That's basically denying my existence and trying to genocide me." Many would call that

statement 'nutty,' but that is not from Becker's list of approved adjectives...he's trying to work with social media...to enforce.'¹²

If you don't know, Babylon Bee is satire, a joke, not a real story, but reality is there's a lot of nuttiness in our world that wants to let 'self' define itself.

And today a lot of people want to redefine love as insisting on your way of talking about you (even if it's not true). In this post-Covid world, literally people quote 'love your neighbor' to insist you submit to the way they want you to live your life (masks, mandates). But love doesn't insist its own way in personal health choices must be followed by all (or their kids in school). The loving or 'right thing' isn't defined by our State, it's defined by our Scripture. Let each person have liberty of conscience and be fully convinced in your own mind, Paul teaches, but don't insist on your own way as the only way for all. Love allows others to differ in convictions and decisions.

With liberty of conscience the unity of Christians is critical

Don't judge by what others do or don't put on their face or put in their body (they fear vs. they don't care). We're not to judge inner motives or externals – alcohol, entertainment, education, etc. Many parents are passionate about school choices for your kids, but don't insist on your own way as **the** way (homeschool only). Love doesn't insist its own way be obeyed by all in. I love that our church has kids in public, private, charter, home, or hybrids. I love our church has people pursuing good in our county schools and district.

Some insist on their own way or the highway – or literally take the highway to get away from CA because it doesn't have their way of life they insist on.

Corinth was worse than CA, but Paul calls the church to share the love of Christ who lived through far worse. Stand in His love. It's not about getting our way in life or church life. Maybe the old way of church or old hymns is your way you insist is the right way. You all have your own way you think church should to be done, but love doesn't insist, it submits. It's not about you. 'I did it my way' isn't a worship song. We sing 'have Thine own way'

NAS/NKJV says love '*does not seek its own.*' We can add own preferences, or own interests, or just seeking self – the Greek is open-ended, fill in blank.

One writer says 'Selfishness lies at the root of a thousand evils and sins in the world and in the church... As when one draws a beautiful face and makes one feature after another stand out until the eyes at last light up the whole and give it complete expression, so in this portrait of love [1 Cor 13] the inspired artist paints the eyes full of unselfishness, seeking in every glance not their own but that which is another's...this photograph of love is given us in order that we may hold it alongside our love.'¹³ How you doing?

Here's a test: you see a new photograph with you in it and a bunch of other people, you've never seen it before, who do you look at first? How much time and thought has

gone to yourself vs. this church today? 1 Cor 13 steps on all our toes so we'll step back. It's loving to hear it: 'it's not about you!'

Lawson's sermon title: Shelve yourselves – you need to put self on the shelf.

Luther in the 1500s battling RCC: 'I am more afraid of my own heart than of the Pope and all his cardinals. I have within me the great pope, SELF.'¹⁴

Ch 12 ends with 'I will show a more excellent way' – **way of unselfish love:**

- the way of self-denial instead of self-fulfillment and self-gratification
- the way of loving the Lord and loving others like you love yourself
- the way of being occupied with others instead of preoccupied with self
- the more excellent way is the opposite of insisting on my own way
- instead of speaking rudely, love speaks redemptively to bring out good

The world says 'build your self-esteem,' God's Word says build up others. Paul says, '*let each one esteem others better than himself*' and '*esteem them very highly in love...*'¹⁵ Gordon Fee says this is what 'Christian love is all about. It does not seek its own; it does not believe that 'finding oneself' is the highest good; it is not enamored with self-gain ... self-worth. To the contrary, it seeks the good of one's neighbor—or enemy.'¹⁶ [Rom. 5:10]

Which takes us to #3. Christ's Transforming Love

Paul used to seek his own way of self-righteousness but Christ's love had transformed him. So his point here isn't just be nice, it's be like Christ.

Love cares how I'm coming across to others, because of the cross of Christ.

Beneath the cross of Jesus His family is my own—

Once strangers chasing selfish dreams, Now one through grace alone.

How could I now dishonor The ones that You have loved?

Beneath the cross of Jesus See the children called by God.¹⁷

Go back to ch 10 where he shows us how to see others in light of the cross.

10:24 *Let no one **seek his own** good, but the good of his neighbor...³¹ So, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.³² Give **no offense** to Jews or to Greeks or to the church of God,³³ just as I try to please everyone in everything I do, **not seeking my own advantage**, but that of many, that they may be saved.¹ Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ.*

Not seeking our own and not being rude or offensive isn't just about good manners, it's about the good news not being hindered by our offensiveness.

This is about God's glory and witness for the love of Jesus to selfish sinners.

So let's not just teach our kids to eat and drink with manners in a moralistic legalistic way or to make us look better as parents. It's about Christ's love.

I read earlier '*the love of Christ compels us...that those who live should live **no longer for themselves**, but for Him who died for them and rose again.*'

Phil 2:21 says sinners '*seek their own interests, not those of Jesus Christ.*'

Phil. 2 was today's scripture reading, where Christ's humility calls us to consider others more important than self. NIV: *'united with Christ...having the same love...Do nothing out of selfish ambition...look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who...made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant...he humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross!...Do everything without complaining or arguing...'* Complaining is rudeness and selfishness, the cure is humble Christlikeness.

One application: say a little prayer before a call or chat, "Help me be like Christ. Help me be loving, kind, not rude, selfish, etc. Work, going home."

Christ's way of love is the contrast and cure to self-seekers, and thankfully Christ's love is big enough to overpower sin's force of gravity toward self.

Self-seeking pulls us down, but Christ's love is like when astronauts go into orbit, they've left earth's gravitational field and they float and forget all the things on earth that pulled them down, they're free from that weight of self.

As new creations in Christ there's a new atmosphere of love

Milton Vincent: 'gospel [love] frees me from the shackles of self-love... frees me to move on to causes and interests greater than myself...the more lovely He appears, the more self fades into the background like a former love interest who can no longer compete for my affections. Preaching the gospel to myself every day reminds me of... His infinite worthiness to be loved by me above all else. These reminders deliver a one-two punch to my innate self-absorption and leave me increasingly absorbed with Christ.'¹⁸

His love transformed rude self-serving disciples who put self first *seeking their own* positions. Jesus taught putting others first in service as a slave, as He didn't seek *'to be served, but to serve, and to give his life...'* (Mk 10).

James and John have been called "card-carrying members of the 'self-seekers' club,"¹⁹ but the same John was transformed by the Savior's love in the upper room (John 13:23) and would later write *'By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren'* (1 John 3:16 NKJV). In Gethsemane, on the way to the cross, Jesus didn't insist on His own way. He prayed *'if it is possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless not as I will, but as you will,'* Mt 26:39

Jesus used this verb to ask the key questions: what and whom are you seeking? (see John 1:38, 20:15). He essentially echoed 1 Corinthians 13:5: "I do not seek *my own* will but the will of him who sent me" (John 5:30). He used this verb for His mission as the Son of Man who came to *seek* and save the lost²⁰ (Luke 19:10), and to teach His followers not to seek for self the things of this life, but to seek first His kingdom (12:29, 31). To self-seeking sinners, He called for self to be denied and daily cross-taking to follow Him (9:23). This is the call of the kingdom. Will you follow?

SILENT PRAYER

CALL UP CLIFF AND SUE FOR PRAYER FOR HIS TRIP

FOOTNOTES:

- ¹ F. L. Cross and Elizabeth A. Livingstone, eds., “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 536.
- ² Allen C. Guelzo, “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *The Encyclopedia of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 2:67. Notable neorthodox scholars who praise Edwards include Richard Niebhuur.
- ³ Mark Noll, “Edwards, Jonathan,” in *World Book Encyclopedia* (Chicago: World Book, Inc., 2007), 114. Warfield said he “stands out as the one figure of real greatness in the intellectual life of colonial America” in *The Works of Benjamin B. Warfield* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 9:515.
- ⁴ Nathan A. Finn and Jeremy M. Kimble, *A Reader’s Guide to the Major Writings of Jonathan Edwards* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2017), 20. They also note he has been called “America’s theologian” and “America’s Augustine,” and they trace the rise of positive publications regarding Edwards after 1949.
- ⁵ Steven J. Lawson, *The Unwavering Resolve of Jonathan Edwards* (Lake Mary, FL: Reformation Trust Publishing, 2008), 3. For more on the legacy of his family tree, see Elisabeth D. Dodds, *Marriage to a Difficult Man: The Uncommon Union of Jonathan and Sarah Edwards* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 202–214.
- ⁶ John F. Thornbury, “Another Look at the 1st Great Awakening,” *Reformation and Revival* 4, no. 3 (1995): 21.
- ⁷ George M. Marsden, *Jonathan Edwards: A Biography* (London: Yale University Press, 2003), 189-91.
- ⁸ “A Farewell Sermon,” *The Sermons of Jonathan Edwards: A Reader*, Wilson H. Kinnach, Kenneth P. Minkema, and Douglas A. Sweeney, eds. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1999), 238. Italics mine.
- ⁹ NKJV.
- ¹⁰ LEB, TNIV.
- ¹¹ Thiselton, 1049–1050, citing Deluz, *Companion to 1 Corinthians*, 190, where he “uses strong language about Christians who excuse themselves from “rules of propriety and social conventions, the polite behaviour customary in their own world” and says “Jesus did not make a virtue out of nonconformity.”
- ¹² <https://babylonbee.com/news/man-asks-that-you-respect-his-preferred-adjectives/>
- ¹³ Lenski, 557-58.
- ¹⁴ Paul Lee Tan, *Encyclopedia of 7700 Illustrations: Signs of the Times* (Garland, TX: Bible Communications, Inc., 1996), 1263.
- ¹⁵ Philippians 2:3 NKJV, 1 Thessalonians 5:13.
- ¹⁶ Fee, 638.
- ¹⁷ Getty Music, “Beneath the Cross of Jesus.”
- ¹⁸ Milton Vincent, *A Gospel Primer for Christians: Learning to See the Glories of God’s Love*, 30-31
- ¹⁹ Lewis B. Smedes, *Love Within Limits: Realizing Selfless Love in a Selfish World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1978), 42. Note also their ambitious mother’s role in Matthew 20:20-24.
- ²⁰ The same verb *zeteo* He used of the good shepherd who seeks earnestly to find a lost sheep and bring it back in Matthew 18:12, which in context calls believers to lovingly seek to restore wanderers to their church.