

How To Be An Unselfish Christian – Living For God & Not For Self

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Carnality & the Flesh

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Bible Text: 2 Corinthians 5:14-21

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The Lord showed me this week and he showed me this even before I went to the Wilds, how selfish we can be as Christians. You know, we are all born with a selfish nature. I never had to teach my kids how to be greedy or how to want what their sister or brother had. We never had to teach our children about jealousy. It seems like they are born with an innate craving for what somebody else has that they don't have. There is a selfish nature within all of us.

Selfishness, I believe, is the essence of all sin. I believe that at the root, at the heart of all sin that can be committed, that at the very core and center you will find selfishness right in the middle. All sin when boiled down reveals selfishness as the underlying factor. And, really, the world promotes it.

The world says, "Man is the measure of all things." They say, "it is about time I lived for myself. You deserve it. Treat yourself. If it feels good, do it."

And so the underlying, motivating factor behind most of our world is selfishness, to gain for self.

Now I believe that all of us need to have things to sustain ourselves. All of us need things. However, a problem comes is when we live for those things and those things consume our thoughts and our hearts and when we want just for self and don't have the glory of God as the motive for what we do. All of us love ourselves.

I never preached a sermon, never—and by God's grace I never will—where I say, "Love yourself," because you can't show me a verse in the Bible that says, "Love yourself."

The Bible teaches that we automatically love ourselves. And so God never said, "Love yourself." God said, "Love others as you love yourself," implying that all of us naturally love ourselves. We all have a love for self. The problem comes as we don't always have a love for God and other people.

We don't need messages saying, "Love yourself." We need messages saying, "Love God and others as yourself."

We all love ourselves and it is not necessarily sinful to love yourself. It is sin, however, when we satisfy self at the expense of God's Word or at the expense of others.

You know, I believe as I said that sin is an underlying or selfishness is an underlying factor behind all sin. And it is hard for all of us to pinpoint it many times because it is easy for us to see it in somebody else's life, very difficult to see in our own life, the reason being is because, "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?"¹

Also it is difficult because it is an internal motivating factor which cannot be seen.

Now the fruits of it can be seen. The results of selfishness can be seen, but the root itself often goes overlooked and hidden from our view. It conceals its identity because of our wicked hearts.

It is a violation of the greatest of God's commandments and that is to love God first.

Selfishness says, "Me first," not "Thee first." It is actually idolatry, the worship and service of self.

Selfishness says, "My will be done," rather than, "Thy will be done."

And, you know, if you put your self interests ahead of God's interests, you, my friend, are living a selfish life.

When the will of man is put ahead of the will of God we are living selfishly. You know, I believe that is the motivation that causes people to rebel against God's will because they want to live for self. Maybe some little self gratification, maybe some selfish pleasure for the moment. And the Bible says there is pleasure in sin, but it is only for a season.

But many will be involved in fornication because they say, "I want it now," rather than waiting for after marriage for that physical aspect of the relationship.

Others are involved in abortion. And I believe that at the heart of every woman who aborts her baby is selfishness. At the very core.

"I can't have a child interfere with my pursuits or my figure," or whatever her reason may be.

Divorce. If you could boil down the reason for divorce, I think you will find it is always at the core selfishness. Who cares about the kids and how this will affect the kids? You know, who cares about God's institution of marriage and glorifying God by staying

¹ Jeremiah 17:9.

together for life. I want out of this relationship and I am going to get what I want. At the core of divorce is selfishness. I want my freedom.

Theft, where people steal things. What is thine is mine and what is yours is mine and what is mine is mine. You know, we are so selfish. We are greedy. We horde things and some of us are so tight we squeak.

Selfishness places itself ahead of God. Selfishness places self ahead of others. Paul wrote in Philippians 2:21, "For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's."²

The Bible says in 1 Corinthians 10:24, "Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth,"³ or well being.

The Bible teaches how we ought to live for the sake of others and not jus for the sake of self.

I have shown you this before. It is just a little diagram that shows how selfishness is at the core of every sin that we can commit. Here are four major sins that all of us may be guilty of from one time or another. All of these sins have their beginning point in selfishness.

Self pity. Self pity says, "I deserve it."

Lust says, "I want it."

Strife says, "I will get it no matter what the cost."

And pride says, "I have it."

In all cases you heard the word "I." All sin, no matter what it is, can be stemmed from selfishness at the core.

Lust is a covetous spirit. Self pity is feeling sorry for yourself. Strife is selfish ambition where you have to step over others to get ahead in life. Pride is a boastful arrogance where you brag about what you have.

Notice lust is the drive of selfishness. Lust says, "I want it," and that motivation to want something that is outside of the will of God is the drive of selfishness. Self pity is the justification of selfishness. After all, I deserve it.

And people have pity parties. Woe is me. And go around with a poochy lip. Everbyody feel sorry for me.

I don't feel sorry for these people.

² Philippians 2:21.

³ 1 Corinthians 10:24.

A self pity person is selfish at the core. Then there is a person with strife. It is sin because it seeks to out do others. It seeks to elevate self. And, you know, some people like to put down others so as to elevate self.

Do you ever wonder why people put down others? Most often the reason is they want to elevate themselves. Selfishness, self elevation. Strife is sin because it results in devilish behavior the Bible says in the book of James chapter three.

Pride is the display of selfishness. And if you were to study what happened in the life of Nebuchadnezzar, you would find that this man fell from his kingship because he was arrogant and thought that he had built the kingdom himself.

We won't get into that, but what I would like to do today is to show you out of 2 Corinthians chapter five how we can have victory over selfishness, how we can be an unselfish Christian while we live in this world.

Notice, if you will, what the Bible says in 2 Corinthians five and verse 14.

Before I read it, though, let me say that the context involves the apostle Paul telling the Corinthians about the sacrifices he made on their behalf.

Some people said, "Paul, you are a maniac. You are mad. You are out of your mind that you would live for Jesus or that you would live the life that you are living."

And Paul says in verse 13, "For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God."⁴

In other words he says, "If people say we are out of our mind, ok. So they say we are out of our mind. If they say I am out of my mind, I do it for God."

Then he says, "Or whether we be sober,"⁵ or in our right mind.

Some would say, "No, you are in your right mind."

He says, "Well, if I am in my right mind, it is for your cause."

But in every case, whatever Paul did, he did it to glorify God or to minister to other people.

What motivated this man?

Verse 14.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us."⁶

⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:13.

⁵ Ibid.

What motivated Paul to be unselfish and to give his life so unselfishly was the fact that Jesus had shown him unselfish love. In order for you to live unselfishly, in order for us to gain victory over this hideous sin the Bible teaches that we must be motivated by the unselfish love of Christ for you.

He says, “The love of Christ constraineth me.”

The Lord saved me when I was 16 years old. And after he saved me I could not but speak the things which I had seen and heard. I had to tell others what God did for me because I experienced his love for me and because of his love for me, I know felt an inner compulsion to share that with other people and to put my life—and rather than to say, “I am going to live for Vince Sawyer,”—to be willing to live for the sake of God and for others.

“For the love of Christ constraineth us.”⁷

He died for us.

Look at verse 21.

Notice, “For he [God the Father] hath made him [Jesus Christ, the Son] to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.”⁸

That we... he gave himself for us that we might be made the righteousness of God in him. The most unselfish act that God ever demonstrated to man was his willingness to become sin for mankind.

He who knew no sin, who was perfect, sinless, spotless, undefiled, separate from sinners, higher than the heavens allowed the sin of the whole world to be put on him so that we... so unselfish was his gift so that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Now I will tell you, if that doesn't motivate you, then something is wrong with your heart. If you can't see that God did that for me, then the very least I do for him, he is worthy of. He is worthy of our entire life. After all he has done for me, after all he has done for me, how can I do less than give him my best and live for him completely after all he has done for me?

We used to sing that song back in college.

“The love of God constraineth us.”⁹

⁶ 2 Corinthians 5:14.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:21.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 5:14.

To be an unselfish Christian you need to be motivated by the unselfish love of Christ for you.

Secondly, to be an unselfish Christian, you must have a funeral for your own selfish desires, plans and interests. You need to have a funeral to your old way of living. You need to have a funeral for your old selfish ambition in life.

I recall a story of three missionaries who went to reach the Auca Indians and they went to a place in South America called Ecuador. When they went, they went to reach these people with the gospel, but ended up being killed by the people they went to reach. Among them was a man named Jim Elliot. Some of you have heard his name.

Another man among them was Nate Saint. And when these... after these men were killed, one day an airplane was flying over that area and one person who was in the plane said, "Hey, look down there. That is the specific location where Nate Saint died."

And the person in the plane said, "No, that is really not the place where he died."

What do you mean? Certainly it is. That is the exact location where he was killed, right there.

No, that wasn't the place where Nate Saint gave his life.

He said, "Nate Saint gave his life many years ago in a little church when he surrendered to the will of God, to do whatever God wanted, to go wherever God wanted him to go. That is where Nate Saint died to Nate Saint. That is where he died to his own will and put his will on the altar and said, 'Thy will be done with my life from this day forward.'"

Look what the Bible says in verse 14.

"For the love of Christ constraineth us; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead."¹⁰

In other words, if Jesus died for all of us, if you are saved by him he did die for you, you know, and if you partook of his gracious offer of eternal life the Bible says you also died. This is an amazing thing, but the Bible describes that when one believes on the Lord Jesus Christ everything Jesus did for him becomes credited to that person's account.

I never died for my sin. Jesus died for my sin. But when I accepted him into my life, I know have died to my sin because I now am one in his death. I now partake of his death. And so if he died for you, then his death has been put into your account, has been credited to you and you therefore have died with him.

That is why the Bible says, "Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth,"¹¹ because we need to recognize that we are dead to ourselves and we are alive unto Christ.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 5:14.

And until you grab that concept that it is not my life. I am dead to my life. It is his life, you will never be a victorious Christian.

Let me give you an illustration. Alan, have you got that trumpet handy? It is right up here.

This trumpet belongs to Alan. Suppose... this is a nice trumpet, by the way. Suppose I was to pull out my wallet and I was to pull out 10,000 dollars. I don't think you paid that for it, did you? And I was to say, "Alan, I want to give you 10,000 dollars for this trumpet." And he agrees to the transaction. He agrees.

I now pay the price and this trumpet now belongs to who? To me. If he was to take it from me with that 10,000 having been paid to him, what would we call that? Stealing.

Do you know the Bible says in 1 Corinthians chapter six that you are not your own. "For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."¹²

If we have been saved, we have been purchased by God. We, therefore, have no more rights to say, "Well, it is my life," because it is not our life. We belong to the one who bought us. And if we say, "I am going to live my life my way," what we are doing is we are stealing what belongs to God because we have been redeemed not with corruptible things, but incorruptible by the Word of God which lives and abides forever and we are redeemed by the precious blood of Christ 1 Peter one says. So he bought us. He owns us. We therefore have died to our own life and I now must live for him or I am stealing from him what is rightfully his. I belong to him. So do you if you have been redeemed.

If you have been redeemed you can't say, "It is my life," because it is not your life anymore. You died to your life if he died for you. Therefore, you must give it to him because it is his anyway.

You see? In order for us to not be selfish Christians, we need to realize his love for us, that he died for me and I died to my own selfish ambitions and plans and interests and now I live for the one who bought me with his own blood.

And then, thirdly, if we are to be unselfish as believers we must be others centered.

You say, "How do I live for God?"

You live for God by living for others. That is how. Jesus said that if you give a cup of cold water in my name you will in no wise lose your reward, for whatever you do to one of the least of these, my brethren, you have done unto me.

¹¹ Colossians 3:5.

¹² 1 Corinthians 6:20.

Whatever you do for a Christian, you do for Christ. And the way we serve him is by serving one another because he is in heaven. And there is nothing I can give him up there. And so the way I live for him is by doing something for those that belong to him.

We must be others centered and not only seek to live for fellow believers, but to all men, the Bible says, but especially those of the household of faith.

Look there again at verse 15.

“And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves.”¹³

He died not so that you would live selfishly anymore, “But unto him which died for them and rose again.”¹⁴

If he did that for me, he gave me eternal life as a free gift, then the least I could do is lay my life on the line and say, “Lord, it is yours.”

We could never buy our salvation. We could never pay enough to earn heaven. Can you imagine eternity, eternal life, everlasting, never ending life in heaven? We couldn't buy that, could we?

As a matter of fact, you couldn't buy 100 years on this earth, never mind buying eternity in heaven. For a person to think that he is going to get into heaven by his own life and his own works is like offering God a filthy rag.

Heaven is too great. We can't earn it. We don't deserve it, but God died for us that we might obtain it. Therefore that should teach us that we need to live for him who died for us and rose again. We live for one who is alive, not for one who was dead.

Many people live for a dead man because they follow a dead man, a dead guru or a leader of a religion. But we follow a living Savior and live for that living Savior.

Look at verse 16.

“Wherefore [in light of this] henceforth know we no man after the flesh: yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.”¹⁵

Well, you say, “What is he saying there?”

In order for us to really be others centered, God must put within our heart an unselfish perspective of other people. We need a new perspective, a new angle of looking at others.

¹³ 2 Corinthians 5:15.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ 2 Corinthians 5:16.

He says here that “we now know no man after the flesh.”¹⁶

You say, “What does that mean to know somebody after the flesh?”

What it means is we no longer view people from a carnal perspective. We no longer look at people from a worldly perspective. We don’t ask, “What can I get from him or how will my relationship with him benefit me.”

And isn’t that the way the world works? You know, people have this on their mind. How can I get advanced? What will promote me?

And if they do something nice for you, usually it is because of what they can receive in return from what they did for you and they look at people as being stepping stones to get where I want to get. They look at people as obstructions in their path. Get out of my way or let me use you to get where I want to get.

But no more do we look at people that way. We who are saved do not look at people that way anymore. We don’t look at people from a worldly, selfish perspective anymore.

There was a time when people looked at Christ that way. They viewed him from a worldly, carnal, fleshly perspective. But now that they are saved, they have a whole new view of Jesus Christ.

And so we have obtained a new unselfish perspective of people because of salvation. Not only that, but God has given us a new unselfish nature since we got saved.

Verse 17.

“Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new.”¹⁷

The Bible there teaches that if you are one who is in the hand of Jesus in relationship to Christ, that you are a brand new creation of God.

In what sense?

Well, in the context, in the sense that I am new in the way I view others. I am new in the way I look at others and what I do for others.

Has that changed in your life? Are you a new creature in the sense that I now look at others from different eyes? I see the lost and I see them in need of God’s salvation. I look at believers and I love them because they are part of my family, the family of God.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ 2 Corinthians 5:17.

We ought to be new creations because we have the new nature and now we look at people from new perspective which results in a new unselfish ministry of telling others how they can be right with God.

Look at verse 18.

“And all things are of God,”¹⁸ meaning everything that is good in our life is good because it comes from God. “...who hath reconciled us to himself,”¹⁹ meaning God brought us back into a right relationship with himself.

How? “By Jesus Christ.”²⁰

Jesus is the mediator. Jesus provided the means so that Rebecca Tubbs could be in a right relationship with God.

Jesus provided the means so that Jacob Varghese could be in a right relationship with God.

Jesus did it.

So then what is my unselfish involvement in this process? To go and tell others how they can be right with God. Go tell them how they can be reconciled.

So notice what he says. He says, “And hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation.”²¹

Everyone in this room has a ministry of reconciliation if you are saved. That is, Derrick Holly now, because he is saved, he has been redeemed by God. He has been brought into a right relationship to God because of Christ. He now has a ministry of reconciling others to God. He has a ministry of introducing them to the truth so that they could be in right standing before God.

And, you know, there is nothing you could do that is so unselfish than tell them the gospel. I mean, when you invite people over to your house with the intent of telling them about Jesus Christ some would say, “Well, that is false motivation there because you are inviting them over so that you can give them your message.”

You know something? That is a good motivation because there is nothing selfish in that whatsoever. I invite the person over to my house, establish a relationship with him so that I can introduce him to the most important message his ears will ever hear in his life, a message which, if he doesn't hear he is going to drop into the pit of hell forever and ever and ever. And so I must tell him about Christ.

¹⁸ 2 Corinthians 5:18.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Ibid.

Now what is selfish about that?

Let me ask you. When was the last time you invited somebody over to your house with the intent of telling them the gospel? We are ministers now, not just minister Sawyer, minister Tomgee, minister Raius, minister Charion. We are all ministers. We have received the ministry of reconciliation.

But some would say, “But I can’t reconcile anyone to God.”

You are right. That is why he clarifies his statement in verse 19.

“To wit,” or what I mean by this is, “that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them,”²² meaning he doesn’t hold their sins against them once they are reconciled. But notice, “and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.”²³

So, Derrick Holly can’t reconcile anybody. Vincent Sawyer can’t reconcile anybody with God. But we can give them the Word of reconciliation.

I can’t go up to a person and say, “I am going to make you right with God.”

Impossible. Only God in Christ can make him right with God. But I can give him the word of reconciliation so that he hears the message of how he can be right with God. And God wants every one of you to do that, to be a witness for Jesus. You don’t need a Bible college degree. You don’t need a master of science or a bachelor of arts or an MDiv or a DMin. All you need is a BA, born again.

If you have got a BA degree, then you have got what it takes to be a witness for Jesus. If you have been saved, born again, then you can tell others how they can be right with God. God has committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

“Now then we are ambassadors for Christ.”²⁴ We need to rightly represent Jesus Christ. “As though God did beseech you by us: we pray you in Christ’s stead, be ye reconciled to God.”²⁵

I was reading something from a missionary in India, K P Johanna and it just jumped... this article jumped out when I saw selfishness in big red letters.

He writes, you know, he quote a letter from the mission field and this person writing says, many times, “We were stoned while preaching, forced to leave the place where we ministered and the village we lived in, threatened not to win souls. We were denied a

²² 2 Corinthians 5:21.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ 2 Corinthians 5:20.

²⁵ Ibid.

place to sleep. We were denied food to eat. We were commanded in force by the army to public labor such as building railroad tracks, high inflation, sickness, lack of transportation in the hot climate are constant hardships that we face on the mission field. But we are assured by the Holy Spirit that the more we suffer for him, the more rewards will be arranged for us in heaven.

“Three of my coworkers lost their lives within this last year while serving the Lord in the villages. Among them was brother Kwangwa, one of our most effective workers. They are now gone to be with the Lord. The seed they have sown will bring forth plenty of good fruit, souls for his kingdom.”

Doesn't that sound like it could have been written by Paul 2000 years ago? But it just came a couple of weeks ago from a person ministering in the field of Myanmar.

Do you know there have been many people that have unselfishly given their lives for others. But here in America we don't know what it is like to unselfishly suffer for Jesus. We have got so much. We are so full and so free and so blessed with material things, we are brainwashed with a selfish gospel many times. We are exhorted, first watch out for yourselves, your family, your home, your health, your security and your rights. And then after all those things are taken care of, then you can start being concerned about others.

Now, friend, that is wicked. Biblical Christianity is others centered.

K P writes in this article, “I strongly believe that the number one enemy that keeps us from reaching the lost world is not the devil, but our own self centeredness.”

And I agree. We can't say, “Well, the devil is preventing me.”

No, I believe that that excuse, it cannot be used. Our greatest enemy is not Satan. It is our own selfishness. That is our greatest enemy.

He writes, “I have found that following Christ is not a matter of whether we enjoy doing something, but rather a deliberate decision of consistent obedience.”

Boy, is that true. Many times I don't enjoy the things I do. There are honestly sometimes I don't enjoy preparing messages, but I have got to do it. I don't always enjoy counseling people, but I have got to do it. And many times we don't always enjoy witnessing, but we do it anyway. We don't always enjoy teaching our Sunday school class, but we keep on going ahead anyway. And I believe that you are starting to become a mature Christian when you do that which is right even if you don't feel like doing it, even when you don't get this feeling up your spine of excitement in doing the ministry. But you say, “I am going to persist. I am going to deny myself. I am going to do what I know is right whether I feel like it or not.”

My friend, you are starting to learn the essence of the Christian life is doing right even when we don't feel like doing right. That is agape love.

May the Lord help us to live so unselfishly that we say, “I am going to live for God and others whether I feel like it or not. I am putting my life on the line for God because selfishness is going to destroy us and we will come to the end of our life and we will regret all of the wasted time and the wasted life when we could have done something that counted for eternity. Instead, we were at home surfing the TV channels and sitting on the couch and sipping our tea and letting hours and months and years go by when we could have been doing something for Jesus Christ.

May God challenge us today to live not henceforth unto ourselves, but unto him who died for us and rose again.

Let’s pray.

Lord, we are so thankful for your Word and for the fact that it is truth, for we do see it, Lord, very clear that the essence of all sin is rooted in our own selfishness. And I pray, Lord, beginning with me that you would root out of my life that evil of self centeredness, promotion of self, pleasure for self, time for self. And, Lord, help us, every one of us, beginning with myself, to live unselfishly for you and for others. For, Lord, you... your love for us ought to constrain us to do it for you.

Father, work in every heart. I pray this in Jesus’ name.

In a moment we are going to conclude our service with an invitational hymn. And when we do I am going to ask for all of you who would say today, “God convicted me of my self centeredness and I have realized today that I cannot live for myself because he bought me. Therefore he owns me. Therefore I am living for him.”

Let’s all stand together.

If you know this song, “Take my life and let it be consecrated, Lord, to thee.” I am not sure if it is in there. Maybe you could find it if it is. But I would like us to sing that song, “Take my life.”

“How to be an UNSELFISH Christian”
“Constrained to Live for God & Not Self”
II Corinthians 5:14-21

Introduction:

***You were not saved to live for yourself, but for God (v. 15)**

How can we live unselfishly?

I. To be an unselfish Christian. . .

You must be motivated by the unselfish LOVE OF CHRIST FOR YOU
(v. 14a, 21) (He died for us)

A. “The love of Christ constraineth us” (v. 14a)

B. “He hath made Him to be sin for us” (v. 21)

II. To be an unselfish Christian. . .

You must have a FUNERAL for your own selfish desires, plans, & interests
(v. 14b) (We died to self)

III. To be an unselfish Christian. . .

We must be OTHERS-CENTERED
(We now live for God by living for others)

We have obtained:

A. A new unselfish perspective of people (v. 16)

B. A new unselfish nature (on the inside) (v. 17)

C. A new unselfish ministry (of telling others how they can be right with God)
(v. 18-20)

Conclusion: