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When God doesn't explain why
Worry

Scripture is taken from the Holy Bible,
New International Version
and The New Living Bible.



Selfishness

What can we do about it?

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Selfishness

What can we do about it?



Egerton C. Long

SELFISHNESS

NOTES

WHAT CAN WE DO ABOUT IT?

‘Don’t be so selfish.’ How often have you heard those words? It may have been a parent speaking to his or her child or children speaking to each other. It may be an adult wanting something that another adult has grabbed or won.

Do these sentences sound familiar? ‘You’ve watched TV all afternoon and now I just want to see one program.’ Or in the back yard: ‘It’s my turn for the bike. You get off it right now.’ In the dining room: ‘There was enough cake for everyone but you took more than your share.’ In the living room: ‘We have only the one car but he takes it all the time.’

‘In our Home Group one member always monopolises the discussion every week.’ Or ‘My idea of a good friend is one who always agrees with me.’

Disraeli said it well: ‘Talk to a person about themselves and they will listen for hours.’

Can you think of other similar comments? ‘The smallest package in the world is a person wrapped up in themselves.’ ‘If one of us would get off this seat, there would be more room for me.’ All of these comments are clear examples of what we call selfishness or a selfish attitude.

NOTES

HOW CAN WE DEFINE SELFISHNESS?

Here is a suggested definition: “Selfishness is a self-centred attitude that focuses primarily (if not solely) upon one’s own welfare and advantage to the exclusion and probable disadvantage of others.” A selfish person is concerned for their own welfare while the interests and happiness of others are ignored.

Selfishness can distort our perspective, our sense of values and our attitudes to others. It can create serious disharmony in a family. It can separate us from those who would like to be our friends. A selfish person can find themselves to be very lonely because others know about their selfish spirit and may want to avoid contact with that person.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

HOW CAN IT HELP US?

The concept of ‘self’ permeates all Scripture as the basis of disobedience and ultimate separation from God. Because ‘self’ is the main element in the fall of human nature, it is a significant topic in the Bible in every sense – social, relational and spiritual.

The word ‘selfish’ (or similar) does not appear very frequently in the Bible. When it does, in one way or another, it is obvious the writer is speaking strongly against selfishness. For example, Paul writing to the Philippians said: *‘Do nothing out*

of selfish ambition.'(2:3) James also speaks out very plainly: *'Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.'* (3:14-16)

In story after story, this message is repeated all through the Bible where selfishness is rebuked. Often it illustrates clearly that to live, speak or act in a selfish manner can only bring disaster and is contrary to God's will for His children. Christ frequently spoke plainly against a selfish attitude. For example He said: *'If any of you wants to be my follower, you must put aside your selfish ambition'* (NLT) Matthew 16:24. Or again in Mark 8:34: *'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself.'*

EXAMPLES IN THE OLD TESTAMENT.

What is the first occasion in the Bible where self showed its ugly head bringing disastrous results? Wasn't it in the Garden of Eden when Satan tempted Eve to take and eat the forbidden fruit? Read the story in Genesis 3. Eve listened to what Satan, God's enemy, was promising her. She looked at the forbidden fruit, then, thinking it would do something just for her, she selfishly took it and ate it. The results have been tragic ever since for the whole of the human race.

It is still the same today. Nothing good comes out of selfishness. It is often the source of ill-feelings or wrong actions bringing bad results or reactions, particularly in families. Decisions

HOW TO RECEIVE JESUS AS YOUR SAVIOUR

If God has been speaking to you as you have read this booklet and if you are willing now to take Jesus Christ as your Saviour, here is what you should do:

Confess – tell God in your own simple words that you are a sinner, needing a Saviour. (Read Romans 3:23)

Accept – tell God that you see Jesus Christ your only Saviour and will accept Him now. (Read Romans 6:23)

Believe – that Jesus Christ has saved you because you asked Him to do so. (Read Romans 10:13)

If you have made this decision today then sign your name here and tell someone else what you have done. Join a church where you can hear God's Word preached and have fellowship with other believers.

I acknowledge myself to be a sinner in God's sight.

I accept Jesus Christ now as my Saviour.

I thank Him for saving me.

Date _____/_____/_____

Don't forget that early morning prayer – each day and every day. May God bless you now and always as you seek to live for Him.

made in the light of our own interests and without considering the final results almost always will bring disaster, either small or great.

ABRAHAM'S SELFISHNESS.

Other stories in Genesis, the first book of the Bible, also illustrate the sad consequences of a person thinking only of themselves. You would hardly expect to find this in the life of Abraham, often called the friend of God. But when he took his family down into Egypt because of a famine in Canaan, Abraham selfishly asked his wife Sarah to call herself his sister. His hope was that no one would want his beautiful wife and kill him so they could have her for themselves. The results in the king of Egypt's family were disastrous and finally the king asked Abraham to leave the country in disgrace. Genesis 12:13 highlights Abraham's selfish intention which later brought adverse consequences.

Sad to say that a few years later Abraham selfishly repeated the same behaviour again. This time God intervened before any further sin was committed, but once more Abraham, the believer, had to leave that country in disgrace. (Genesis 20) God obviously forgave Abraham and no mention of his selfish actions is made in the New Testament.

There are many others in the Old Testament who acted selfishly, King David for example, when

he wanted Bathsheba, went to great lengths to take her for himself and hide his sin. (2 Samuel 11). But again God forgave David because there is no mention of these wrong actions in the New Testament. God is still the forgiving God, but that is no excuse for selfishness at any time.

SELFISHNESS IN THE NEW TESTAMENT.

There are several instances in the New Testament which clearly depict a selfish 'me first' attitude which Christ spoke against. For example, James and John (before Calvary) came to Christ one day with the unexpected request that they should be given the places of highest honour when Christ came into His Kingdom (John 4:34.) Their mother seems to have made the same request. Among the answers Christ gave are these thought provoking words: '*Whoever wants to be great among you, must be the servant of all*' and in Luke's version of the Beatitudes he records Christ's directive to us: '*Do to others as you would have them do to you.*' (Luke 6:31)

On another occasion when the disciples were arguing about who was the greatest in their group, Christ simply said: '*If anyone wants to be first, he must be the very last and the servant of all.*' (Mark 9:35). In many of His parables, Christ emphasised taking the lowest place. For example, in His well known story of the Good Samaritan, Christ helped the man who was

our hearts are emptied of pride, selfishness, ambition and everything that is contrary to God's law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride, and conceit and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God to do the work He came to do.'

WHAT CAN WE DO?

Can we say again: we need to allow the Holy Spirit to do the work He came to do. That work is to make Jesus Christ real to us in every area of our lives. Let's start with our early morning attitude. Could we make this our daily morning prayer: 'Lord Jesus, I give myself to you for this day, so that your Holy Spirit may have His way in me today.' Those who have prayed that way regularly every morning, have found those simple words have made a very real difference in their life and attitude each day. Will you try it?

Resolve now, before the Lord, that if there is any part of your life that is displeasing to Jesus Christ, you want the Holy Spirit to deal with it. He can take it out of your life so that Jesus Christ can be seen in you more and more each day.

Are you willing for Him to do that? The Holy Spirit is waiting to work in your life – why not begin today by allowing Him to do what He wants to do – to make Jesus Christ real to you personally and for Him to be seen in your life day by day?

In Galatians 6:1-3 we read: *'If any one is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual, should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Carry each other's burdens and in that way you will fulfil the laws of Christ. Remember, if someone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.'*

DEVELOPING AN UNSELFISH LIFE STYLE

How do we do this? The final answer lies in our daily relationship with Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit who alone can reproduce Christ in us. We can start by answering these questions: Do we want to be different? Are we content with our present relationship with Jesus Christ?

Does it concern us that we don't seem to be growing in Christ's likeness? Are we just drifting along as a believer, knowing very little of victory through Christ? In plain words: Is selfishness too evident in our daily living and behaviour? If our honest answer to some of those questions is in the affirmative then there is a real need of major changes. This is where the Holy Spirit can do what we cannot do on our own. As we daily yield to Him, He will do whatever is necessary to bring about those changes in our lives and our behaviour so that Jesus Christ and not self will be seen in us.

The great evangelist of the late 1800's, D. L. Moody, said this: 'I firmly believe that the moment

questioning Him to see that the Samaritan who cared for the wounded man was the only one who really acted in the right way, when the others were too selfish to do anything to help. (Luke 10:25-37)

Dr. Billy Graham wrote: 'Christ meant that His followers are to be different. But merely being different is not enough. We are to be the cleanest, the most holy, the kindest, the most unselfish, the most courteous, the most industrious, the most thoughtful, and the most loving people on earth.'

STATEMENTS IN THE EPISTLES.

Much is written in the Epistles to the various churches about the behaviour and attitude of the church members, with instruction in every letter concerning the personal relationships within the various assemblies. Reading between the lines it is obvious that many of the selfish attitudes too often found in modern day churches were present back there in those first century groups.

In his remarkable 'Love Chapter' (1 Corinthians 13), Paul stated plainly that *'love is not self-seeking.'* Why did he write that? In Ephesians he wrote: (4:32) *'Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving one another.'* Again in 5: 21: *'Submit to one another.'* In Philippians Paul said: *'Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.'*

(2:3-4) What was the problem? Selfishness in a church!

The apostle James devoted much of his epistle to speaking against the way the believers seemed jealous of one another. In his excellent book on the Epistle of James, Dr Warren Wiersbe wrote: 'Apparently the believers James wrote to were at war with each other over positions in the church, many of them wanting to be teachers and leaders. When they studied the Word, the result was not edification but strife and arguments. Each person thought that his ideas were the only right ideas and his ways the only right ways. Selfish ambition ruled their meetings, not spiritual submission.'

Strong words? But they lead us to see what selfishness can do in the life of any church. We all need to be careful that our own thoughts and desires are not ruled by a selfish desire to be number one in whatever group we belong to, but we need rather to allow the Lord to place us where He wants to use us. Remember what Paul said about Christ: '*He made himself of no reputation, but humbled himself and took on himself the form of a servant.*' (Philippians 2:7)

WHAT IS OUR PERSONAL RESPONSE?

AM I SELF-CENTRED OR SELFISH?

How can we keep from becoming self-centred?
How can we allow Christ to be seen in our lives

day by day and in our service for Him? How can we keep from becoming selfish and staying that way? Are you – am I, willing to face up to some tough questions? Let's try and answer each one as honestly as we can – yes or no.

1. Have you ever wondered why you do not have more friends? Yes or No
2. Are your family 'clashes' sometimes caused by your self-centredness? Yes or No
3. Are you lonely because others can't take your 'know-it-all' attitude? Yes or No
4. Are you guilty of making decisions without considering the impact on others? Yes or No?
5. Are your actions always the kind you want others to do towards you? Yes or No
6. Do you think more of your reputation than of being honest? Yes or No
7. Has Christ been allowed to deal with your self-centredness? Yes or No

If we are really sincere in our desire to be an unselfish person, one place to start may be to ask for the help of a good friend. We all have 'blind spots'. We sometimes need others who can help us see those aspects we might otherwise miss. We could ask this friend or mentor to lovingly confront and correct us should we sound or act in a self-centred way. This could apply to other areas of our life also.