

Unselfish Love

Being able to adapt to others is the hallmark of a true Christian.

One of the most important facets of love is unselfishness, which is characterized in Romans 12:16 as the willingness to adapt and adjust to the needs and desires of others. “Live in harmony with one another; do not be haughty (snobbish, high-minded, exclusive), but readily adjust yourself to [people, things] and give yourselves to humble tasks. Never overestimate yourself or be wise in your own conceits” (The Amplified Bible).

People who have grasped the meaning of this Scripture and applied it in their lives have learned what it means to be reduced to love. They are not selfish. They have learned to be adaptable and to adjust to others.

On the other hand, people who think more highly of themselves than they should find it difficult to adjust to others. Their inflated opinion of themselves causes them to see others as “little” and “unimportant.” They selfishly expect others to adjust to them, but they are often unable to accommodate others without becoming angry or upset.

It was very difficult for me to learn to adapt and adjust myself to the needs and desires of others. To be honest, I just wanted my way, and I got upset when I did not get it. I was selfish!

However, that is not the trademark of a true Christian. These words of the apostle Paul exemplify his self-sacrificing love

for others. "Although I am free in every way from anyone's control, I have made myself a bond servant to everyone, so that I might gain the more [for Christ]" (1 Cor. 9:19).

Paul put his love into action—he walked in love, and he taught his disciples to do the same. He adapted himself to others so that he might win them for Christ. He had obviously learned that the salvation of another person's soul was more important than having his own way.

I sincerely believe that if more people would learn that lesson, there would be more dedicated Christians in the world today.

Paul made the decision to adapt himself to others for the sake of Christ. I believe he became sensitive to what the people around him needed from him and tried to give it to them.

As believers, we should be willing to do the same. Telling people "I love you" is rather weak if we don't go beyond speaking the words and attempt to meet their needs.

You'll find that not all people need the same thing from you. One of your children, for example, may need more of your personal time than another does. One friend may need more encouragement on a regular basis than another.

Sometimes you may get weary of being available to meet the needs of others. During those times, it is good to remind yourself that God gives us grace for whatever He places in our lives and that we are blessed to be loved and needed.

But doing things for others and acknowledging their needs are not the only ways to express unselfish love. Respecting individual rights is also very important.

Selfish people expect everyone to be like they are and to like whatever they like, but love respects the differences in people. If God had wanted all of us to be alike, He would not have given each of us a different set of fingerprints. I believe that fact alone proves we are created equal but different.

We all have different gifts and talents, different likes and dislikes, different goals in life and different motivations. The person who loves respects the differences in other people and allows for their freedom by giving them room to be themselves.

Freedom is one of the greatest gifts we can give. That is what Jesus came to give us. All of God's creation has great worth and should be treated with respect.

Learning to adapt to others, appreciate their differences and give them the freedom to be themselves is learning to walk in love. This revelation has truly changed my life, and I am convinced it will change yours too. Remember, loving others is more than words. It requires action—effort, involvement and sacrifice.