

**Daily Life with Christ. Love-24: Understanding the objective, universal, unchanging, eternal nature of love: Personal love vs. Depersonalization (vilification and demonization).**

(Pdf copy at <http://www.fbcweb.org/Doctrines/033018.pdf>; for background and complete series, see <http://www.fbcweb.org/doctrines.html>).

Evil begins when you  
begin to treat people  
as things.



**George:** I just don't see how you can say that both the desire for the good of another and desire to be united with another are required for love. There are plenty of people that I do not care to be united in any way. I don't have time for everyone.

**Stephen:** What I said was united in the proper office. This office or union could be as general and infrequent as one's relationship to the mailman or a checkout person at the local grocery store. The desire for union need not be intimate. You just want the person to do well—he is not a “thing” or a bad to be avoided. And you see the person as a person with eternal value—he is not a thing, a tool. You value each and every person as a person rather than how they help or hurt you. We are to love (value and respect) each person personally, as a person, even if the particular office of love is by nature an impersonal association.

**George:** What is the difference between impersonal association and what is called “impersonal love.”

**Stephen:** I do not believe that love for another person is ever “impersonal.” I also believe that that kind of language speaks volumes of the influences of what is known as structuralism in philosophy of language. In sum, this term was created in the minds of certain linguistic communities rather than on the ontological nature of love abstracted from reality as such. It is a term based on idealism and rationalism rather than taken from reality as such. To put it another way, “impersonal love” is fruit of idealism, created by the mind, rather than abstracted from the extramental real world of beings and love.

**George:** What is wrong with “impersonal love.”

**Stephen:** Think about the word: impersonal. Not as a person?

**George:** But that is not what the term means. That is not how they define it.

**Stephen:** I know, but at best this goes back to their linguistic community that creates reality based on words rather than looking at the true nature of love and persons. They define reality based on what their group decides. There is no “impersonal love” in the Word of God. It certainly was not what Christ taught. The biggest problem I have with it is that it tends to treating others in impersonal, non-person, ways. It also emphasizes the attitude of the lover rather than the object of love—thoughts are more about self (not having mental attitude sins) than really caring about the object of love.

**George:** Are you saying that we are to be personal with everyone?

**Stephen:** Yes, we must avoid at all costs treating people as objects, as things—not as persons, impersonally. Like I said, every single person we meet is made in the image of God and has infinite value. We are to treat all with value as persons.

**George:** But we do not have time to be personal with everyone.

**Stephen:** You do not have time to treat everyone with infinite value?

**George:** But we can only have a few personal friends.

**Stephen:** That is where the offices of love come into play. Thinking of love for others in terms of different offices takes care of the different relationships we have. My love for my wife is different than my love for my mailman. I am to treat them both with infinite value and worth, but because of the different offices, the love is going to be different. This means that I will spend far more time with my wife than my mailman. I may spend only a few minutes a year with my mailman. But I can still seek his good and desire to have a good relationship with him as my mailman. I have a personal love for both my wife and my mailman—it is always wrong to treat any human being simply as an object, it is inhumane and unchristian. The difference is that I have an intimate personal relationship with my wife because that is the proper office—a kind of personal relationship, an office, that I do not have with anyone else. Both are personal but due to the different offices, it has different dynamics. What is avoided is treating my wife or my mailman as things.

**George:** I agree that it is easy to treat others as things. How can we avoid this?

**Stephen:** First, by 2<sup>nd</sup> person orientation.

**George:** What do you mean by 2<sup>nd</sup> person?

**Stephen:** Well, with regard to love, it is helpful to think of love in three persons. In the 1<sup>st</sup> person, the object of my love is myself. In 2<sup>nd</sup> person it is a “you.” In 3<sup>rd</sup> person, the person is “loved” as a thing, generally referred to as a he/she that is not consciously present.

**George:** I get 1<sup>st</sup> person. Can you tell me the difference between 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> person?

**Stephen:** In 2<sup>nd</sup> person there is a conscious face-to-face relationship of mutually shared attention between persons—it is direct and unmediated. In 3<sup>rd</sup> person, there is no direct and mutually shared attention. Either the person is not present or you are not paying attention to what he is saying—there is no 2<sup>nd</sup> person connection. We see aspects of this in people who suffer from autism, who have difficulty connecting with people as people.

**George:** Can you give me an example?

**Stephen:** OK, what if I said to you “he (George) is asking me to give me an example.” What if throughout our conversation I referred to you as he, as if you were not even here. My guess is that you would be motivated to get in my face and tell me to quit referring to you in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person because you are right here. All personal person love is developed in 2<sup>nd</sup> person. The same is true in our relationship with God.

**George:** With God?

**Stephen:** Yes! If I was primarily oriented to myself in thinking of God, my love would be for me more than Him. If I was primarily oriented to God as a non-present object, a means to get other things, I would think of Him in 3<sup>rd</sup> person—He! A true relationship with God only takes place in 2<sup>nd</sup> person, a mutual sharing of love, thoughts and life. I cannot develop a personal relationship with God throughout each day if my focus is on self (1<sup>st</sup> person) or God as an absent He (3<sup>rd</sup>). In other words, if I walk around my house all day and only refer to me and He, I am not walking with God in a personal way, the You-me orientation. I cannot walk with God, before God, or after God unless and until I am personally living with Him in the 2<sup>nd</sup> person “You”—a life of open communication through all the details of life. The same is true of my wife.

**George:** What do you mean your wife?

**Stephen:** Well, if I only thought of her as what she does for me (1<sup>st</sup> person) or an impersonal object (3<sup>rd</sup> person), how could we develop a relationship, given that in any true person relationship there is a 2<sup>nd</sup> person sharing of ideas and sympathies. I can only imagine what my wife would say if every time I was around her I referred to her as “her” or “Patti”—as if she is not a real person in my presence. Of course, the danger for all of us is that we do not have to talk to others in 3<sup>rd</sup> person to treat them as things, to fail to love all humans as humans with eternal value. Whom has God called but Christians to love all, that is, to personally respect every human being as having eternal value. I am afraid that we Christians have lost our way. It is my belief that the current vilification by Christians on the Right and Left give strong evidence that much of contemporary Christianity has been hijacked by culture and political parties.

**George:** What do you mean “hijacked.”

**Stephen:** That their attitudes and sentiments are more in keeping with their political parties than the Lord Jesus Christ and the Word of God . . . like we see with those on the Left who demonize everything that Trump does and those on the Right who demonize, for example, the high school kids from Parkland who want more gun control.

**George:** What side are you on?

**Stephen:** Neither! I strongly disagree with our President and his supporters in very profound ways, and I strongly disagree with some of what the kids from Parkland are saying about guns in very profound ways. What I am objecting to is all the name-calling—note how the opposing camps are describing the other with Hitlerian language—in such vitriolic and demonic terms. One can disagree with Trump and the high school kids without the demonization. It is not like you get more votes the more you demonize your opponent. We should avoid all the hate and fear mongering on talk shows. By the way, I am surprised how Christians can so freely malign, vilify, and depersonalize others. Can’t we be more compassionate? For example, can’t we sympathize with the kids on the trauma they experienced as they witnessed their friends get murdered in high school and still recognize that they are young and naïve without demonizing them. Why do conservative Christians insult them by saying all kinds of vile things about them: by insulting them, blaming their parents, the school system, or because of some other reality that is created by their minds rather objective reality as such? I think the current animosity toward the kids of Parkland by some Christian conservatives is a horrid witness for Christ and a superb example of depersonalization—it is inhumane, unchristian, and manifests a heart of defensiveness instead of love and understanding. Can’t we disagree without the name-calling? Perhaps both liberals and conservatives who spew all kinds of vile Hitlerian language on each other should stop and think about the fact that such depersonalization is perfectly in line with the non-personal attitudes and feelings of the Hitlerism that they are attributing to others.