

A Proper Love for Self (Matthew 22:34-46)

If we were to condense into capsule form the total duty of man to God and the total duty of man to man, we would find such in the two commandments found in today's Scripture reading: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" and "Love your neighbor as yourself." These commandments are invitations that enlarge, increase, and enrich life rather than rules that restrict and impoverish life.

Since I just mentioned the word "rules," let me respond to what we know as the Golden Rule from Luke 6:31: "Treat others just as you want to be treated." My problem with the Golden Rule is that some people don't love themselves, much less like themselves. So, I don't want them treating me the way they want to be treated. One creative person came up with a "Platinum Rule": "Treat other people the way they want to be treated."

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But let's get back to our two commandments from our Scripture reading. One of the greatest truths to be found in these commandments may be missed by the casual reader. The second commandment reveals that the measure of our love for self is the measure of love that we are to express toward our neighbor. It follows that if we do not have a proper love for self, we will have no authentic guidelines for loving others as we do ourselves. If we have a low view of self, we will have a low view of others. If we hate ourselves, we cannot love others. And we cannot really love God until our hate is dissipated.

Unless we come to a proper evaluation of self, it will be impossible to truly love God and others. The best way to come to this estimation of self is through a discovery of the extent to which God loves us. Do you find it difficult to love God? Do you find it impossible at times to love others? If you answered in the affirmative, could it be because you have a very low view of yourself?

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Let's begin to answer those questions by looking at this question: What are the symptoms that indicate the proper love for self? Do you have a habitual tendency to belittle yourself? This can be a form of self-destruction that indicates a lack of proper love for self. Do you refuse to believe in your own ability to achieve meaningful goals in your life? If you cut yourself down, it may indicate that you have a lack respect for yourself. Do you hesitate to attempt that which is new or difficult? If so, is it because of laziness or is it due to a lack of confidence in yourself, which in turn is a result of your low self-esteem?

Do you reject your real self by attempting to escape through artificial means? Some resort to the use of drugs because they have a low estimate of themselves. Alcohol is often used by those seeking to escape from a concept of reality in which they consider themselves less than they ought to be.

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Do you reveal an improper love for yourself by a continuing flight from one place to another and from one situation to another? Suicide may be the ultimate in self-hate. One who commits suicide often is the one who has had very low self-esteem and has felt unworthy to exist.

So, what are some of the factors that contribute to this lack of proper love for self? Some experience an absence of love in early youth. It is highly important that children experience the genuine, steadfast love of parents. Children who are raised without parents often come to believe that they were rejected because they were unlovely. To feel unloved does something to a child's sense of self-esteem. The deficiency of affection can lead to mental illness and to various kinds of abnormal and destructive activity.

Some are overwhelmed by negative and insulting criticism during their formative years. Parents and teachers need to be very cautious lest they resort to

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cutting criticism in their efforts to provide guidance for children. They should major on constructive criticism that contains stimulating compliments. Some have a low opinion of themselves because of uncomplimentary comparison with others. This comes about as a result of an individual's failure to recognize oneself as a unique creation of individual worth. People must accept themselves as they are and appreciate their strength without letting their weaknesses destroy their sense of self-confidence and personal worth.

Some belittle themselves and even hate themselves because of unresolved guilt. To deal with this problem properly, we need to recognize the sinfulness of sin and acknowledge our personal responsibility for our sin. We can resolve the guilt that destroys by confessing our sin to God and accepting his forgiveness. God is the God of forgiveness. When God forgives, he holds the sin

against us no longer, and he restores a warm relationship. Perhaps the best way to

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solve the problem of unresolved guilt is to accept God's forgiveness and then to forgive ourselves. If God forgives us, then we should forgive ourselves.

We must not forget that Satan is an accuser. The basic meaning of the name Satan is "to accuse."

The Bible teaches us that the devil is a liar, a deceiver, and a falsifier. He is in the business of trying to destroy us. Often he destroys us by calling attention to our own faults, flaws, and failures. If he can destroy our self-confidence and self-respect, he will make midgets out of those whom God wants to be giants.

If we would love our neighbor as God commands us to, we must have a proper love for self. There is no better place for the individual to develop this proper love for self than within the home. The following

suggestions are offered for consideration within the home.

Recognize God's love for you and find full forgiveness in his gift of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (John 3:16). Fully forgive yourself. Praise God for his

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mercy and grace and respond to the truth that when God forgives, God forgets. Accept the truth that Christ died for your sins. Quit looking back to the failures of the past. Look forward and encourage others to look forward.

Evaluate yourself properly. Jesus encouraged his disciples to overcome the agony of anxiety by coming to a proper evaluation of their proper worth in the sight of God (Matt: 25-26). Decide to accept the uniqueness of your own person (Matt 6:27). You are the only person in existence that is exactly like yourself. Accept yourself. Be at peace with

yourself. Do not fret because you are not like someone else.

Decide to discipline yourself. In the words of Matthew 7:13-14, our Lord is describing the narrow, disciplined life that leads one to life on its highest plane and to its richest quality. This kind of life comes to those who discipline themselves.

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Dedicate yourself to the highest and to the best (Matt 6:33). Many of us live on a low level because we never dedicate ourselves to the highest. Jesus would invite and encourage us to dedicate ourselves to the doing of God's will in life. Those who live day-by-day to fulfill the will of God for their personal lives and who give themselves in ministries to others will come to have an attitude of appreciation for self as well as for the Lord and for others.

If we are to be able to love others as self, we must first of all love ourselves properly. We come to a

proper evaluation of self as we recognize ourselves to be the objects of God's supreme concerns. God loves you. God really loves you. He gave his Son on the cross to reveal the extent of his love for you. Since God loves you so much, you should recognize your own personal worth. As you recognize your worth, you will find yourself recognizing the worth of others also.

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What are the lessons we can learn from this Scripture reading from Matthew?

This Scripture reading from Matthew teaches profound lessons about love and the essence of the law. In this passage, Jesus responds to a question about the greatest commandment, emphasizing two key principles: Love God, Love Your Neighbor. The first commandment is to love God with all your heart, soul, and mind. This highlights the importance of a

deep, personal relationship with God, where love is the foundation of faith and obedience. The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. This underscores the interconnectedness of loving God and others, suggesting that true love for God manifests itself in how one treats others. These commandments encapsulate the essence of Christian ethics, guiding believers to prioritize love in their actions and relationships.

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Please bow your heads as I pray.

Heavenly Father, you display your almighty power in loving us without regret. In the human heart of Jesus, your Son, you have shown us how far love can go. Give us a love that is forgiving, generous, and gentle like His, that we may recognize and welcome Him in our brothers and sisters. And may our hearts reach out first to the poorest and the least lovable, with the gratuitous love you have given us in

Jesus Christ our Lord. We ask this in the name of
your Son and our Savior, Jesus Christ. **Amen.**