

BLOG 48

LOVE YOURSELF, REALLY?

MATTHEW 22: 35-40

“A LAWYER, ASKED [JESUS] A QUESTION TO TEST HIM. ³⁶ “TEACHER, WHICH IS THE GREAT COMMANDMENT IN THE LAW?” ³⁷ AND HE SAID TO HIM, “YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIND. ³⁸ THIS IS THE GREAT AND FIRST COMMANDMENT. ³⁹ **AND A SECOND IS LIKE IT: YOU SHALL LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF.** ⁴⁰ ON THESE TWO COMMANDMENTS DEPEND ALL THE LAW AND THE PROPHETS.’”

THE WORD “LOVE” IN THIS PASSAGE IS THE GREEK WORD *AGAPAO*. IT IS A LOVE THAT PLACES THE INTERESTS OF OTHERS ABOVE ONE’S OWN INTERESTS. IT IS A SELF-SACRIFICING LOVE. IT IS THE SOLDIER WHO FLINGS HIMSELF ONTO A GRENADE IN ORDER TO SAVE HIS COMRADES. IT IS THE MOTHER WHO FORGOES A MEAL SO THAT HER CHILDREN CAN EAT.

IN OUR PRESENT CULTURE THIS PASSAGE IS GREATLY MISUNDERSTOOD. FALSE BELIEFS WORK THEMSELVES INTO OUR THINKING, CAUSING INFECTION AND WORSE. FALSE BELIEFS CAN LEAD US INTO BELIEVING THINGS WHICH ARE HARMFUL TO OUR SPIRITUAL WELL-BEING.

THE 1ST GREAT COMMANDMENT IS TO LOVE GOD WITH OUR TOTAL BEING. THE 2ND GREAT COMMANDMENT IS TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBORS. OUR MODERN POST-CHRISTIAN CULTURE REVERSES THE ORDER OF THE TWO COMMANDMENTS AND THEN PERVERTS THE COMMANDMENT TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR. WE NOW ACT LIKE THE 1ST GREAT COMMANDMENT IS TO LOVE ONESELF.

HERE ARE A FEW CHOICE CULTURAL QUOTES ABOUT LOVING YOURSELF:

“F.L.Y. FIRST LOVE YOURSELF. OTHERS WILL COME NEXT.”

“LOVE YOURSELF FIRST AND EVERYTHING ELSE FALLS INTO LINE.”

“LOVE YOURSELF FIRST, BECAUSE THAT’S WHO YOU’LL BE SPENDING THE REST OF YOUR LIFE WITH.”

“LOVING YOURSELF ISN’T VANITY. IT’S SANITY.”

“WHAT IF YOU SIMPLY DEVOTED THIS YEAR TO LOVING YOURSELF MORE?”

THERE ARE NUMEROUS PROBLEMS WITH THIS WAY OF THINKING. I’M ONLY GOING TO DEAL WITH A FEW.

FIRST, IT TURNS THE 10 COMMANDMENTS ON THEIR HEAD. JESUS SAID THE 2ND GREAT COMMANDMENT IS A SUMMATION OF COMMANDMENTS 5-10 WHICH ALL DEAL WITH HOW WE TREAT OR RELATE *TO OTHERS*. THESE COMMANDMENTS ALL FOCUS ON HOW WE TREAT OR REGARD OTHER PEOPLE. NONE OF THEM DEAL WITH HOW WE TREAT OURSELVES. THESE COMMANDMENTS ARE OTHER-DIRECTED, NOT SELF-DIRECTED. FURTHER, THESE COMMANDMENTS ARE BINDING REGARDLESS OF OUR SELF-OPINION. MOREOVER, WE CANNOT DELAY OBEDIENCE UNTIL WE LEARN TO LOVE OURSELVES. WE MUST OBEY NOW.

SECOND, JESUS TOOK ON THE FORM OF A SERVANT AND REFUSED TO HOLD ONTO HIS GODHEAD IN ORDER TO DIE ON THE CROSS FOR US. *PHILIPPIANS 2:6-8*. WHERE WOULD WE BE IF JESUS FOCUSED ON LOVING HIMSELF RATHER THAN ON DOING THE FATHER’S WILL?

THIRD, THE MODERN THINKING ABOUT LOVING OURSELVES FLIES IN THE FACE OF THE ENTIRE BIBLE. CONSIDER THESE VERSES: “BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF GOD.” “FOR ALL HAVE SINNED AND COME SHORT OF THE GLORY OF GOD.” *ROMANS 3:23*. PAUL’S OWN SPIRITUAL JOURNEY IS INSTRUCTIVE.

IN THE EARLY PART OF HIS MINISTRY PAUL SAID HE WAS *THE LEAST* OF THE APOSTLES. *1 COR. 15:9*. TOWARD THE MIDDLE OF HIS MINISTRY HE SAID HE WAS THE LEAST OF THE SAINTS. *EPHESIANS 3:8*. THEN, AFTER A LIFETIME OF MINISTRY, PAUL SAID HE WAS THE CHIEF OF SINNERS. *1 TIMOTHY 1:15*. AS PAUL GREW CLOSER TO GOD, HE THOUGHT LESS AND LESS OF HIMSELF.

FOURTH, THE PHRASE “LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR AS YOURSELF” IS **NOT** A COMMANDMENT TO LOVE OURSELVES. RATHER, THE PHRASE IS AN **EXPLANATION** OF **HOW** WE ARE SUPPOSED TO LOVE OUR NEIGHBOR. THERE IS NO COMMANDMENT IN THE BIBLE THAT WE LOVE OURSELVES. LOVING OURSELVES IS A *GIVEN*: WHEN WE ARE HUNGRY WE EAT; WHEN THIRSTY, WE DRINK. WHEN WE ARE SICK WE GET MEDICAL ATTENTION. WHEN WE ARE TIRED, WE REST. NO INVOCATION IS NECESSARY FOR US TO DO THESE THINGS. WE DO THEM AUTOMATICALLY. SO, LET’S READ THE COMMANDMENT AS THOUGH IT WERE A DIALOGUE BETWEEN YOU AND GOD.

YOU: GOD, WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO?

GOD: I WANT YOU TO LOVE YOUR NEIGHBOR.

YOU: BUT HOW?

GOD: THE SAME WAY YOU ALREADY LOVE YOURSELF.

IN CONTRAST, THE NEW TESTAMENT IS FULL OF COMMANDS TO LOVE OTHERS. **SOME EXAMPLES:**

2 CORINTHIANS 13:11 “AIM FOR RESTORATION, COMFORT ONE ANOTHER”

2 CORINTHIANS 13:12 “ GREET ONE ANOTHER WITH A HOLY KISS.”

GALATIANS 5:13 “SERVE ONE ANOTHER.”

GALATIANS 6:2 “BEAR ONE ANOTHER’S BURDENS”

EPHESIANS 4:32 “FORGIVING ONE ANOTHER”

THERE ARE NEARLY 100 SIMILAR COMMANDS.

MOREOVER, THE ENTIRE THRUST OF THE BIBLE IS CONTRARY TO THE NOTION THAT BIBLE COMMANDS US TO LOVE OURSELVES. GOD APPROVES THOSE WHO UNDERSTAND THEIR SINFULNESS: "BLESSED ARE THE POOR IN SPIRIT, FOR THEIRS IS THE KINGDOM OF HEAVEN." *MATTHEW 5:3* CONSIDER ALSO THESE VERSES: "FOR BY THE GRACE GIVEN TO ME I SAY TO EVERYONE AMONG YOU NOT TO THINK OF HIMSELF MORE HIGHLY THAN HE OUGHT TO THINK...." *ROMANS 12:3* "WE HAVE ALL BECOME LIKE ONE WHO IS UNCLEAN, AND ALL OUR RIGHTEOUS DEEDS ARE LIKE A POLLUTED GARMENT." *ISAIAH. 64:6*

FINALLY, THE APOSTLE JOHN TELLS US THERE IS AN UNBREAKABLE LINK BETWEEN LOVING GOD AND LOVING OUR NEIGHBOR:

1 JOHN 4:19-21 "WE LOVE BECAUSE HE FIRST LOVED US. ²⁰ IF ANYONE SAYS, "I LOVE GOD," AND HATES HIS BROTHER, HE IS A LIAR; FOR HE WHO DOES NOT LOVE HIS BROTHER WHOM HE HAS SEEN CANNOT LOVE GOD WHOM HE HAS NOT SEEN. ²¹ AND THIS COMMANDMENT WE HAVE FROM HIM: **WHOEVER LOVES GOD MUST ALSO LOVE HIS BROTHER.**"

THE ENTIRE THRUST OF THE BIBLE IS THAT WE LOVE GOD FIRST AND FOREMOST. IF WE DO SO, THEN WE MUST ALSO LOVE OTHERS., ESPECIALLY THE NEW TESTAMENT, CONTAINS 2 GREAT THEMES THAT BEGIN WITH THE LETTER "S". "SELF" IS NOT ONE OF THOSE THEMES. THE THEMES ARE SUFFERING, SERVICE AND SUBMISSION.

I RECENTLY FINISHED A BOOK ABOUT WW2: "*THE WINTER FORTRESS*". IT DESCRIBES THE SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGN OF NORWEGIAN SOLDIERS TO SABOTAGE GERMAN EFFORTS TO CREATE AN ATOM BOMB. NORWEGIAN SOLDIERS MADE INCREDIBLE SACRIFICES TO THWART GERMANY'S ATTEMPTS TO DEVELOP THE ATOM BOMB. THE BOOK DEMONSTRATES HOW GREATLY WE DEPEND ON THE NOBLE, SELF-SACRIFICE OF OTHERS. OUR MOTHERS ARE OFTEN A PICTURE OF LOVING SELF-SACRIFICE.

WE MUST NOT BE WRONGLY INFLUENCED BY CULTURE. WE MUST EXCEL IN LOVING GOD AND OTHERS TO THE GLORY OF JESUS CHRIST.