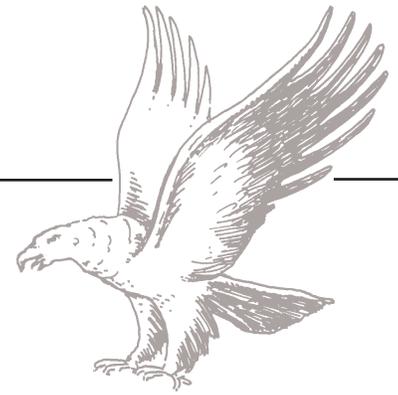


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



March 10, 2013

Love Yourself

The ability to deal with others as we should is a function of our own self-respect.

If we want to love others as God directs, we first must learn how to love ourselves.

“You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the Lord” (Lev. 19:18).

“And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:39).

The command to love our neighbor is second only to the command to love God (Matt. 22:37-38). But the wording of this commandment contains a curious detail that warrants further attention: we must love others “as yourself.” The same premise underlies Jesus’ Golden Rule: “Therefore, *whatever you want men to do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets*” (Matt. 7:12).

These verses seem to be promoting ourselves as the standard of doing good. In light of other texts that stress humility, isn’t this approach self-centered?

Actually, there is an important psychological principle in play here: *How we treat others is heavily influenced by how we view ourselves.* People who have learned how to be comfortable with

themselves generally have healthy relationships with those around them. Conversely, those who struggle with despair and self-loathing often have trouble forming meaningful relationships with others. There is an unmistakable correlation between what we think about ourselves and our ability to befriend others.

Consider two individuals: The first is well-adjusted, and expects others to treat her with respect, fairness, courtesy, and dignity. Given that expectation, this person sees Jesus’ command to “love your neighbor as yourself” as a reliable yardstick for making ethical decisions. So she will strive to treat others with respect, fairness, courtesy, etc.

The second individual has a very low self-image; she sees herself as an object of derision and rejection from others. Because her frame of reference is seriously flawed, she struggles to recognize opportunities for serving and helping others. Her lack of self-respect inhibits her ability to love others “as herself.” (And her poor relationships will reinforce her poor self-image.)

Clearly, self-respect is the key ingredient here. So where does this self-respect come from?

Remember, “love your neighbor as yourself” is the lesser of the two great commandments. We cannot love our neighbor if we do not love ourselves; but we cannot love ourselves *if we do not love God above all else.* This love for God is our response to all that He has done in our behalf. God has demonstrated that He loves us despite our failures, and is willing to forgive us again and again if we sincerely try to improve. Our baggage from the past could easily overwhelm us with guilt, but the knowledge that God loves us transforms our self-pity into self-confidence. John summarized the connection well: “We love because He first loved us” (1 Jn. 4:19, NASV).

Genuine self-love is not a product of narcissism or self-glorification. It arises from a heart that basks in the warm glow of God’s love. Once I can see myself as a child of God—one to whom God has given His best—I will be eager to give my best to others.

– David King