
Heart and Soul ... A Weekly Meditation

August 16, 2015

When It Is Difficult to Love Yourself

"...and love your neighbor as yourself."
Luke 10:27 (Common English Bible)

Nothing runs deeper in human nature than the desire to be loved. It is seen in people of every age. Children craving attention and approval, teenagers eager to be acceptable and affable to their peers and adults longing to be welcomed and valued. In every age there is present the widespread desire to be liked and loved. There is nothing wrong with this. Approval, acceptance, and appreciation are yearnings of nearly every normal person. Each of us wants to be loved.

It is upon this healthy quality of the human condition that Jesus constructs his Great Commandment, "Love God and love your neighbor as yourself." Yet, for numbers of people there is present a practical difficulty – they have trouble loving themselves. And this is where the Great Commandment comes apart for them. Perhaps because of some physical defect, lack of general attractiveness, or problems with personality or temperament, they have experienced avoidance or blatant rejection. The consequence is pain. Unpopular and unwanted, it is difficult to give to God or neighbor a love they have not known personally.

Desperate for acceptance and community – or simply a friend – lonely people will compromise nearly anything. They will become anyone others want them to be, value what others demand, and behave as others do, even if that behavior is wrong and hurts others. They willingly put to death the person they are. Being authentic only brought loneliness. Peer pressure is the common label used in such circumstances. And it is a powerful weapon by those who would manipulate others to conformity.

Jesus offers an alternative. This very commandment – The Great Commandment – demonstrates Jesus' reverence for people. Jesus assumes that people love themselves because he found them worthy of being loved! This is demonstrated again and again in the ministry of Jesus. Zacchaeus, a tax collector, dishonest and loathed by the people, a woman caught in moral failure, and a man who lived alone in a graveyard, Jesus loved those others ignored. And there is Christ's power. By personal influence he brought out in them what was the finest in them. He gave them a new self-respect and that became the basis of their recovery and transformation. Jesus did this for them. He continues the same today for those who receive him.

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