The Two Greatest Priorities of Life

Jesus reduced life’s significant priorities to just two: Loving God—with all your heart, soul, and mind—and loving others, as you already do love yourself (Matthew 22:36-40). Contrary to an avalanche of humanistic propaganda, there is no third commandment to “love yourself” in this key passage of Scripture. Perhaps surprisingly to some, our inherent “love of self” does not need to be encouraged by God or others. Each of us finds it easy, even natural, to judge and respond to all aspects of life by how things affect us. Have you wondered why this is so? It’s not because of any great dislike we have for ourselves but, instead, our basic love of self is predictably the pivot point for all of life. This truth is so basic that God states our natural self-love, which we already have and do not need to increase, provides the criteria by which we can examine our love to others.

Loving God and loving others, as described in the Bible, are not natural. Loving in these two dimensions requires a personal spiritual transformation (2 Corinthians 5:17). This change begins with belief in Jesus Christ for eternal life (John 3:16) and progresses by the power of God’s Spirit (2 Corinthians 3:18) through an application of God’s Word (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

Love for God and love for others are typically evidenced by responses to life’s trials and blessings. Expressions of love— or lack of them— expose either a biblically sound or an unscriptural perspective toward the two greatest priorities of life.

With a biblically sound perspective, we love God and are growing in this love by obeying Scripture (1 John 5:3). If we have an unscriptural perspective, we won’t care that much about God. As a result, we will do what we want (live by fleshly desires and self-oriented feelings) and violate clear directives of Scripture with surprising impunity (see Galatians 5:13-17).

With a biblically sound perspective, we will love others (1 John 4:7-11) and grow in that love. We will do what is best for them, considering them as more important than ourselves (Philippians 2:3-4). With an unscriptural perspective, we won’t care that much about others except for how they provide supposed benefits to us. Because of that self-centeredness, our fleshly desires will dominate us so that our feelings actually determine what is “best” (meaning comfortable or pleasurable for us) in responding to others. As a result, we will often remain oblivious or unconcerned that we have created significant problems and heartache for them.

The motivation to love God and others will be steadfast as long as we stay fixed on Jesus (Hebrews 12:1-2), the Supreme Example of authentic love. With Christ at the center of our lives, our love for God and others will grow. As a result, the two greatest priorities of life will not be a subject to discuss but will be a way of life.