

Fulfilling the Command to Love Others While Maintaining Healthy Boundaries

Are we called to love others or ourselves? YES! When Jesus is challenged to recall the greatest commandment, he responds, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.” (Matthew 22:37 CSB) In hearing this most of us wonder, “Where’s the line between sacrificial love and being a doormat?” Or, “If we are called to forgive over and over again, at what point am I just enabling them?” How do we resolve these apparent tensions? We can start with remembering Jesus also seized this opportunity to remind them of another crucial commandment: Love your neighbor as yourself (Leviticus 19:18, Matthew 22:39). Author Ike Miller in his devotional *Gods Healing for Your Difficult Childhood* states, “This command to love your neighbor as yourself contains a key element that we often overlook in thinking about what it means to love the manipulative people in our lives: we’re commanded to love our neighbor as ourselves.

Jesus isn’t asking us to act unloving toward ourselves in the work of loving others. In fact, to love our neighbor well, we must understand how to love ourselves well. Loving ourselves informs how we love others. This isn’t a “me first” manipulation of Jesus’ teaching. This is a corrective to our distorted idea that loving others means disrespecting ourselves. The truth is quite the opposite: you can’t love your neighbor well if you don’t love and respect yourself well in the first place. When I love others without respect for myself, my love for them ultimately becomes fear-based, self-serving, and manipulative. I end up asking, how can I love them in a way that gains their approval or avoids their rejection? This isn’t love. It’s codependency.”

Codependency attaches our value to how people esteem us, for example, by drawing worth from their need for us. Codependency pulls our attention away from God, our Source for identity and affirmation. Rooted in fear, codependency is at the heart of people-

pleasing. When driven to cater to others' whims and wants, aside from what God wants for us and what He wants us to desire for ourselves, we set up idols. This unintentionally swaps devotion to our unchanging Savior to human puppeteering that is finite and fickle, at best. Jesus' example illuminates a path to live above codependency. He teaches us to live dependent on Him, and interdependently with others. His covenant of peace anchors this truth. People, places, and things cannot provide the validation, peace, and purposefulness that we require. Jesus, as God and man, exemplified this, remaining firm in His identity and authority, refusing the temptation to placate others, even when He was most vulnerable (Luke 4:1-13).

Get to know who you are in Christ by getting to know Jesus. Grow in grace with Him and align with your identity.

Seek out counsel when needed as you learn and grow.

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