

Freedom From Self-Love

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Preacher: Jerry Shriver

[0:00] Father Jerry. All right. Thank you so much. Yeah. I thought I maybe misread my assignment there.

! Yeah. No, thank you so much for having me. You're right. We did come from Matt Kennedy's church, and we were both actually roommates together before we got married.

And I was roommates with this guy, too, who is visiting. So we got some history here. But I and I have a pact not to tell each other's churches the nitty-gritty.

We're making that pact right now. I'm looking him in the eyes. All right. Well, let's get started. This topic of getting beyond the idolatry of self really jumped out at me when I saw it on the list of topics that I could choose from that I sent me.

And I thought, there's something that I have some expertise in. Well, my expertise is not in the study of self-idolatry, much less in the healing of it, but in the experience of it.

[1:17] So I come to you as a sinner, someone that can hopefully seek in my own prayers to be healed of this thing that we're going to be talking about tonight, self-idolatry.

And as someone who struggles and who wants to say with Paul, I press on towards the goal of that high calling. And so tonight we're going to do this together.

And I hope that it will inch us all together in the right direction. So it's not me coming down up from Endicott to do any of this. We're going to talk about it together and move in the right direction.

Here's how I'm going to proceed. I'm not going to be able to back up everything that I say. I won't have time for it. So if something clicks in your mind that you want to ask a question about, save it and ask me and I'll do my best to answer the question.

Also, I'm going to actually switch the terminology a little bit. Instead of saying idolatry of self through the whole talk, I'm going to say self-love.

[2:24] Self-love can be good. It can also be negative. So when you hear me saying self-love, don't have a question in your mind about what I'm trying to do there.

Try not to get confused. I'm using it in the negative sense. Not just the normal care of our body, the normal care of our psyche and our soul, but an inordinate concern for those things.

An inordinate concern for our body, our soul, our psychology. Admittedly, inordinate is a relative term. So I also would beg you not to dismiss the possibility of this involving you.

Say, well, I'm not inordinate in anything, so this doesn't have anything to do with me. Instead, use it as a relative term so that you can ask the Holy Spirit to guide you on that question of how inordinate this might affect you and what it might need, what the Holy Spirit might lead you to do to start getting in a direction of correction.

And ultimately, I want to point us to the possibility of being recaptured by a sense of the God who is there in order to rein in these affections and our passions and our self-love.

[3:45] First, let's just get a scriptural picture of negative self-love. Paul says in his second letter to Timothy, chapter 3, verses 1 through 5, Understand this, that in the last days there will come times of difficulty, for people will be lovers of self.

Then he gives a whole list after that, and that whole list after that could be an explanation of what it means to be a lover of self. Lovers of money, proud, arrogant, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, heartless, unappeasable, slanderous, treacherous, reckless, swollen with conceit, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God, having the appearance of godliness, but denying its power.

That's quite a list of sins there that can flow out of self-love. We see a network of interrelated sins that have self-love as its mother, as its source.

The opposite of this would be love of both God and neighbor and self-control. So keep that opposition in mind as well. Jesus says in Luke, chapter 14, verse 26, If anyone comes to me and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be my disciple.

And again, in John, chapter 12, verse 25, he says, Whoever loves his life loses it. And whoever hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life.

[5 : 38] You hear what Jesus is saying there. A reversal of self-love is necessary for true personhood, for us to be truly human, for us to have our communion with God intact, for us to enter into the kingdom of God.

Now, we know how this business of self-love started. Satan, in the form of a serpent, entered the garden and did what? He sought to kill the human race.

And I would suggest that he sought to kill the human race with self-love. Listen carefully to this familiar passage. First, you know that mankind in Adam and Eve subsisted in God.

They had their existence in who God was. They were nothing apart from him. It wasn't just that they were a creation over here that had communion with God, but their very life was bound up in his presence.

Well, the serpent said to the woman, after tempting her to eat of the fruit, and she resists just a little bit, he says, you will not surely die.

[6 : 52] For God knows that when you eat of it, that fruit, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her.

What's he doing? Why didn't he hack the head off of that serpent? Why is he letting her talk to him? And he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked.

And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. Self-love is introduced here. Self-promotion.

You can be like God. Think of it. Think of the heights to which you can promote yourself by taking this fruit. Self-indulgence. Doesn't the fruit look good?

[7 : 56] Just indulge a little bit. And what about self-reliance when they finally realize that they're naked and they rely on themselves to cover their shame, to cover their sin, to cover the distance that they have created between them and God?

It's this self-love that has been introduced that now spawns all these other sins. Satan comes in with an anti-faith, an anti-trust, that yanks humanity out of its subsistence in God and seeks to murder mankind by making man his own reference point.

Just love yourself. Just take what will suit you, what will satisfy you. And he initiated there a battle for the human soul.

Well, let's see what some signs of self-love are for us. How do you know if you are wrapped up in self-love? Well, we all are.

We all are. But there are some signs of when self-love is being manifested. It's when someone seeks pleasures, comfort, ease, and a fulfillment of desire over a chasing after virtue, over chasing after holiness in the Lord.

[9 : 25] It's when somebody is overly concerned with bodily or psychological wellness. We know how that can happen. We can be overly concerned with the things that are going on in our body, the things that are going on in our mind, and we can navel-gaze, and we can inspect and search and look and be wrapped up in those things.

But that's all still pretty abstract. So it might be easier to identify what happens when obstacles are put in the way of our love of ourselves.

Do you know what I mean by that? If an obstacle is placed in the path of us getting what will give us self-love, there's other manifestations that come out. The list of sins, for example, that we saw above from Paul's letter to Timothy.

But if you see regular signs of resentment or self-aggrandizement in yourself, if you see yourself belittling someone else or gossiping about them, if you find yourself maneuvering yourself to put yourself in the best situation possible for your own agenda for your life, rather than sacrificing for brothers and sisters, there's some self-love coming out.

And obstacles to that can be very infuriating. You may manipulate circumstances. You may manipulate people to get what you want and what you think you need out of life and get very angry if someone puts an obstacle in the way of you getting what you want.

[11:01] We don't know anything about that, do we? No. We have a straight path set for ourselves. We know what we want. We know what we need. Don't get in my way. Well, life's been put here to get in your way.

Just so you know. He's been put here by God to get in your way of self-love. So that's going to create tensions.

That's going to create frustrations on both parts. Stick with it, life. I'm just plugging my buddy there. But what happens here is that it leads to a removal, a self-removal.

We remove ourselves from God's presence when we're exhibiting these signs of self-love. And it leads us from being involved with God and His people to removing ourselves even from other people eventually.

We can start to isolate ourselves and just fester in this self-love and these other things that spawn from it instead of giving ourselves in love to others.

[12:14] Idolatry of self, or what we've been calling self-love, obscures our view of God. And I'll just make a few illustrations to try to deepen the point and give us something concrete to hold on to.

What Satan did there in the garden when he enticed Eve and introduced self-love to her, a love that no longer depended on God but depended on self, what he did was set humanity in a room of mirrors where humanity, where Eve and Adam and us are caught in a room of mirrors where we can only look at ourselves, where ourselves are always reflected back at us and we try to spend our whole lives looking in those mirrors and gauging how we're perceived, how we're doing, and what we can do to better our image or better our standing or better anything about our circumstances in this room of mirrors.

Whereas God, what God had set up was a room of windows. A window accessing Him, His glory, His beauty, our life in Him.

Satan closed that in on us and put us in a room of mirrors so that we are no longer able to see all that God has for us and our life is secluded and separated from Him.

One church father calls it a veil, not just a room of mirror, but a veil of self-love that prevents us from being healed of our sins, that prevents us from seeing even the other passions and the other sins that are spiraling out of us.

[13:56] It keeps us from being able to see those and to identify them and to deal with them. It keeps man from being unable to see his own spiritual poverty.

Think of the scales that Jesus healed, the scales that fell from the blind man's eyes when he finally could start to see Christ for who He was.

There are scales over our eyes that self-love puts there that don't allow us to see our own spiritual poverty, let alone God or other people and their needs.

With self-love, man is shut up within himself and unable to open up to God, to brother, to sister.

This constant reflection of self then governs his whole way of life. It's how we think, how we act, how we move, always in relation to a reflection of ourselves.

[15:04] Well, how do we overcome the idolatry of self? How do we overcome this self-love in all its manifestations if we start to see it manifesting in our own lives, which if we look carefully, we will.

We all will. But if we see it, how do we deal with it? Well, there's a paradox to that. You will never heal self-love in yourself.

You'll never fix your self-love by trying to fix your self-love. Does that, could you see how that works? If, if you're focusing on your self-love, you're still focusing on yourself.

If you're trying to fix it, you're just spending more time with it, thinking about it. That's right. Focusing on it actually perpetuates it.

Well, then where does that leave us? If, if I can't focus on it in order to fix it, if I can't get my hands on it and tweak it and work with it, where does that leave me?

[16:13] Well, sometimes you just have to take the hands off. sometimes you have to let go a little bit and say, yes, I recognize it in myself and it's coming out and the more I, I look at it, the more manifestations of it I see and it's actually way out of hand and there's no way for me to get a handle on it.

Well, sometimes you just have to start by saying that. It's out of hand and I can't get a handle on it. But beyond that, I'll just give some maybe, hopefully constructive ideas of how to move forward when you recognize bits of self-love in yourself or the rampaging wild animal of self that actually could come out and often does if we're honest.

The first is to recapture a sense of the God who is there. Who turned away? Did God turn away or did man turn away?

Man turned away. We have turned away to self-love. God has always been there. He has always sought us as his creation to come in back into communion with him.

What did God say when he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day? He spoke to Adam.

What did he say? Do you know? Where are you?

[17:38] Where are you? Where is my son? Where is my beautiful creation? Where is my daughter? These crowns of creation that I made for communion with myself who had their subsistence in me, I don't see them.

Where are they? Where are you? He is always there and he is a God who is present. He is a God who seeks. He has sought us ultimately and finally in his son Jesus Christ.

Jesus took on our human nature. He took on the sin that belongs to our human nature. And what did he do with it? He did not turn away from God again to just be one of us.

No. Taking on our human nature, coming into the matrix of humanity, he killed once for all that self-love, that sin, that death that we had opened the door to.

And he trampled down death in himself and raised to new life so that we could have that life in him.

In all that, in all that familiar gospel event, message, God who is there is reaching for us.

[19:06] So I want to keep that in mind as we are answering the question, how do we recover from self-love? Idolatry of self.

How do we find God in the midst of self-love? Well, he is already there reaching out for us in Christ so that that subsistence that we had with God can be restored.

Our existence, our very life that is shriveled up without him, leading us onward to death is restored in him through reconciliation with the Father, through forgiveness of sin, through the healing of our sin nature, from rescue.

He has rescued us from corruption, disintegration, disintegration. We are no longer an integrated being, but he has rescued us from that, from decay, and from death and reversed our self-love in the process.

What does a reversal of self-love look like? It means that he has given us the distinguishing marks of Christians. Love for one another, love for one another, and self-control.

[20:29] Distinguishing marks of the Christian. So he has sought us in Christ and in doing so, those who believe are placed where?

How does Paul put it quite often? We are placed in Christ, in him. We are placed, it's a phrase that I like to use at St. Andrew's quite often, it's a, we are placed within the sphere of all God's loving activity when we are placed in Christ.

Jesus is the sphere of all God's loving activity. He looks at Christ and he looks on him with absolute love. And being placed in him, we are recipients of that same love, that same vision, that same intimacy with God.

And it is a place of intimacy and empathy. We are not just in Christ in a vacuum or in an abstraction. It's a place of intimacy and empathy where Christ comes alongside us as well saying, you are in me and I have you and I'm going to walk with you, I'm going to share my life with you and I'm going to share your life intimately and empathetically.

It's a place where instead of groping for God in your sin and in your self-love, you see that you've already been found.

[21:57] You've already been loved by a God who was always there, reaching out to take you in. So we are placed in Christ but then we are something else happens.

Christ is placed in us by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ comes to indwell us, to convict us, to teach us, to empower us, to assure me and you of what we have in Christ and to aid us in offering ourselves, to aid me and to aid you in offering yourself as a living sacrifice.

You know this verse from Romans, offer yourself a living sacrifice. How does the prayer book, what does the prayer book do with that verse? Can anybody tell me? Offering yourself a living sacrifice.

The prayer book has that in the communion service, in the Eucharistic service. I'm saying it, okay? It links Holy Communion to this double idea of being in Christ and Christ in us.

Listen, and here we offer and present to you, O Lord, ourselves, our souls and bodies, that integration that Christ has made for us, to be a reasonable, holy, and living sacrifice.

[23 : 28] We humbly pray that all who partake of this holy communion may worthily receive the most precious body and blood of your son, Jesus Christ, be filled with your grace and heavenly benediction, and be made one body with him, that what?

He may, yes, he may dwell in us, and we in him. So our prayer book beautifully joins these ideas of being in Christ and he in us to holy communion.

And that's my next point. In holy communion, we see a God who is there, a God who is still seeking us.

Even after he has made us his own, he doesn't just say, well, you're mine, I'll move on and find some more people out there who aren't yet. No, he is still seeking us and offering himself to us in the sacraments, both in baptism and in holy communion.

communion. We hear God asking, Adam, where are you? Where are you? Come and commune with me. Come and live with me and let me live in you.

[24 : 42] The office for holy communion also says that we can thank God for assuring us, right, in the post-communion prayer, of what?

Yes, that through this sacrament, we've got people saying the whole thing, it's wonderful, for assuring us through this sacrament of your favor and goodness toward us, that we are true members of the mystical body of your son.

You see how all this is coming together and it comes together for us in the sacrament? God reaching out to us, Adam, where are you? I'm still here, I'm here for you, I'm here for you week in and week out, and I'm assuring you through this sacrament that I'm toward you, not against you, to draw you in and to assure you that you are a member of the mystical body of Christ.

So, I typed another point, but it's left off something, so I don't know what that says, I'll move on. We also have, it's probably best time wise too, we can also engage in disciplines in order to try to foster the awareness of self-love in ourselves and to lift it up to God.

Intentionally walking in the way of the cross, and that's what Lent is about, isn't it? Intentionally walking in the way of the cross so that we can uncover those unsightly parts of our spiritual life and offer them up to God in the hope of the sure forgiveness that he gives.

[26 : 23] Unintentional suffering is a means of stripping the world away. God uses that to strip the world away from us, and you heard about that last week in exposition of Psalm 38, or 88 somewhat, I believe.

I was able to listen to it online, and the grace that you find in darkness. As you begin to suffer, you see God calling to you to break you from the world and to break the world from you, and the world's headlong rush from self-love into oblivion calls you back to himself.

He draws you near, and suffering presses on us the life of Christ. The Spirit uses all that suffering and everything that we go to to press on us the life of Christ. But in disciplines, we can also pursue holiness that Christ achieved for us, and we can kind of intentionally submit ourselves to a sort of suffering in order to amplify that.

Prayer and fasting are ancient and biblical practices of intentional suffering, meant to expose our dependence on ourselves, our dependence on the world, and ask us, ourselves, to depend rather on God.

Prayer and fasting can give us a time of meditation on the wonders of Christ, on the wonders that he has revealed to us in his word, and to respond in repentance. There's always a dynamic reciprocity between those two things, meditating on the wonders of God in his word, repenting, and then doing it again.

[28 : 02] And I would lastly, you like that word, right? Lastly, suggest that a very practical way that we can expose our own self-love and maybe even take practical steps towards killing it.

It's going to be maybe controversial for some, but we might want to take prolonged periods of abstinence from media. From media.

Do you see why? Media, especially social media, is designed to keep us in a room of mirrors, looking at ourselves.

How many likes did my post have? How many people are following me on Twitter? How many people are looking at my Instagram? All other kinds of media can do that too, but these social media put us in a room of mirrors where God has shattered that and reached in and taken us out and allowed us to commune with him.

So maybe we ought to have some prolonged periods of abstinence to allow ourselves to soak in the rays of God's love. In conclusion, I'll just say there is hope.

[29 : 22] If you find signs of self-love, idolatry of self, there is hope because we know that to be true. The whole history of redemption is a history of God, a God who is there, wooing, mankind away from sin, self-love, and idolatry of self.

A God who stands between us and death to which self-love leads. We have a God who shatters the mirrors and invites me and you to participate in his divine life of restoration, but more importantly of love, of love.

He works in you a love for him and for other people that belongs most properly to his own character, allowing you to bear the marks of God, showing that you are his very own.

I'll end there. I'll end there.