

Daily Life with Christ-59. New Year Challenge: Nature of Love and nature of our cognitive unconscious life.

As we have noted, the point of the Word of God, the spiritual life, and the telos of our human nature is to love God with all our hearts, souls, and minds. Connected with this love is love for others and ourselves.

Matthew 22:37 Jesus said to him, "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind." 38 "This is the first and great commandment. 39 "And the second is like it: "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

There are two interrelated desires in all true love: a desire to be closer to the object of love and a desire for the highest good of the object of love. While it is not always possible to be closer to the object of love because of certain factors outside of one's control, in true love one always seeks the highest good of the object of love. This holds true of God, others, and even self.

Regardless of the circumstances of life, it is God's will that we continue to grow in love for Him and all others. However, proper love always requires proper knowledge. As a matter of fact, there cannot be any true and blessed relationship with God or anyone apart from growth in proper knowledge and proper love. The great enemy of a robust relationship with God, with others, and as a human being is always related to improper love and improper knowledge. No doubt, 2018 will bring many changes. However, the one thing that must remain constant is our continued journey through life with God is proper knowledge and proper love. Think of yourself as a bus driver on a great journey to God. On the way, people will get on and off the bus. Moreover, many on the bus will criticize and complain: there will always be those who tell you to turn here or there because you are not going in the right direction. We need resolve to continue on your journey in love of God and not be distracted by all the noise. We need to redouble our resolve not to let others distract us—especially all the contemporary political haters, name callers, and fear-mongers on the far left and far right.

Undoubtedly, 2018 will be filled with many distractions from the world, the flesh, and the devil (1 John 2:15-16), tempting us turn the bus away from our journey in growing in love for God and others, by tempting us to travel to areas of more materialism, sensatism, and mammonism. We need to resist all distractions and temptations that would hinder us from the three loves that are to be ever-increasing throughout 2018 and our entire lives. Recall that love is the root, hinge, and fruit of any and all spiritual virtue and thriving (1 Cor. 13; Eph. 3:14-20). Let us note a few more details these three loves.

First and foremost is love for God. Believers can only live and thrive in God by proper knowledge and proper love. This proper knowledge and proper love includes many things, but it all revolves around the interplay between the intellect and the will, the mind and the affections. Of late, in our study of the eternal perspective, we have noted how this love for God consists in such things as seeking the things above where Christ is as per Colossians 3:1-2, "Set your mind on the things above, not on things that are on earth." The word translated "mind" is φρονεῖτε (there is no word "mind" in the original), includes both the thinking and affections, thinking and attitude, the intellect and the will, which again points to necessity of proper knowledge and

proper love. To set one's mind above reflects a love for God with the heart, soul, and mind; this transitions the believer into the eternal perspective. This perspective enables the believer to enjoy the transcendent life, the abundant life; and only this view can give the believer the capacity to appreciate just how unique his life is in both time and eternity. In the eternal perspective, the believer finds the true meaning of his life and thus can enter into the beauty of both his life and his death as ineffable gifts from God. Such a believer escapes the trap of viewing himself according to the fleeting and superficial standards of the kosmos—he avoids the idolatry of Mammonism (Matt. 6:19-24).

The second love that is to grow progressively is love for all others. Loving others requires treating each and every human being with dignity. Consider how this is violated by Christians in the realm of politics today. Consider what Scripture says about slandering other human beings (James 3:9) and its “demonic” source (James 3:15). One of the first areas we should focus on in treating others with dignity is with our spouse, our most beloved on Earth. We must resist all impulses from our cognitive unconscious (CU) to react and thus judge our beloved. We have no right to tell him/her what must be in his/her mind or what his/her true motives are. We have no right to try to win an argument against him/her. We need to slow down and think like adults who desire to solve problems rather than like children who call each other names. All communication should be focused on attempting to find rapport—rather than discussions resembling tennis matches of lobbying words back at each other until one wins or one walks away. We should never think of our communication as a debate, with a winner and loser. The goal is always to acknowledge the other's perspective—rather than assuming to define the other's perspective and motive. Communication should more often take the form of first person, “I,” rather than “you.” When one judges, one says things like “you don't care [= you are despicable, do not have the decency of character to love/care about me really],” “you always do [= you are always evil].” However, when one does not judge, one speaks like an adult who is attempting to deal honestly with a problem without judging: e.g., “when I see this, I feel this, and I prefer this . . . or I am having trouble understanding this.” When we judge others, it is always about “you” and “your faults.” When we speak as adults with love, it is about what we perceive, and how we desire to resolve the situation as we allow the person to tell us what is in his/her mind without pontificating what he/she must be thinking or what he/she always does. Instead of using judgment language like “you don't understand [= you are an idiot],” the adult asks “help me understand.” We ought to always acknowledge the other's viewpoint even if we do not agree. Moreover, we ought to acknowledge his/her feelings, which means we avoid all attempts to depersonalize him/her, treating him/her as an object instead of a human being with his/her own perspective with feelings that are worth understanding. It is the acknowledgment of how others feel that separates us from machines and animals. It is the dignity that we give others that separates us from all other creatures. This also applies to political foes as well. We do not have the right to criticize anyone unless we can restate his position to his satisfaction. Let us resolve to stop all of the judging and strawmen. Let us resolve in 2018 to grow in our love for others, beginning with our most beloved. Again, it is all about proper knowledge and proper love.

Third, loving ourselves also requires proper knowledge and proper love. We should love ourselves as special creatures who are objects of the love of God; we are to affirm all that we are

in the Lord. Likewise, we are to reject all of those so-called loves (improper loves, lusts)—usually of the lower sense nature that hinders us being our true selves in Christ. To love oneself in the Lord is to enjoy spiritual self-esteem. To love ourselves is to seek our highest good, which is in God and His will—and which always includes loving all others as God loves others. To love self is to grow up as a mature human being—spiritually, mentally, and emotionally/affectionally. Not loving ourselves is living under the control of our base cognitive unconscious (CU) nature. We have noted the power of our CU: its ever-present and extremely powerful force (it processes about 10 million bits of information a second) behind many of our irrational but fully conscience (which only processes about 40 bits of information a second) decisions. It is the CU that contains patterns of feelings, likes, and dislikes that are often unbeknownst to us, and which “bribes” the conscious into making decisions without us even being aware of it. Often it is the CU that gives us those urges to do things that we fully and consciously know are self-destructive. The CU is the power that motivates our conscious mind to find a reason to do what we know is wrong. We all know how hard it is to diet or stop a vice when our CU craves those things that we enjoy (from the dopamine that floods the brain with pleasure). The CU is the root of all of the addictions that dominate a person’s life. All of those things we know we should not do and yet do anyway testify to the ever-present power of our CU over our rational conscious self.

Again, to love self is to seek the highest good for self and this includes ending those self-destructive brain addictions of the CU. Let’s consider this nature of these brain addictions. These addictions have chemical and biological aspects to them in the form of neuronal activity and what is called the addiction molecule, dopamine, which actually changes the structure of the brain. There has been exhaustive research on the brain, and experts now recognize that what they call “the addictive brain” is a modern-day epidemic. It is estimated that more than 500 people die every hour as a result of addiction-related diseases. Costs to our addicted nation runs about 600 billion every year in health-care costs, lost productivity, and crime. Families are destroyed, careers are lost, and lives are wasted on a massive scale. In all addictions, the brain’s natural reward system is hijacked, leading to an almost-irresistible urge to pursue the object of addiction. I say “almost” because regardless of the material brain, we have a separate mind that can redirect the brain and thus avoid developing an addictive brain, but only by the conscious mind. As believers, we are blessed because God has given us His Spirit for “self-control” (Gal. 5:23, ἐγκράτεια), and He has given us His Truth, so we can be truly free (ἐλευθερώσει, John 8:32).

The CU is one of the most dominant forces in our lives. Everyone knows what it is like to eat or drink or smoke something that one consciously knows, is fully aware, is self-destructive; yet the desire/pleasure is simply too great to resist many times—all while the addictive brain motivates the conscious mind to rationalize away the irrational/harmful act. The most common brain addictions include food, sex, pornography, tobacco, alcohol, caffeine, cocaine, methamphetamines, and video games. The difference between having a normal and healthy brain versus an addictive brain comes down to compulsion. The pathological addictive brain cannot stop these activities even though there is full awareness that these activities are destroying one’s health and in some cases families and friends. I will speak more on the addictive brain in the future. The good news is that actualization of good choices can reshape the CU. Recall that we are like triangles of cognition, feeling/emotions, and behavior; and how each angle affects the

other two. This means that all we have to do to change two angles is to change one. And God has given us the means to change by knowing and actualizing His truth in our lives, and thus changing our CU for the good where it no longer instinctively desires self-destructive things. Imagine that, possessing such an extremely powerful CU; one that has been reshaped for our good, for the glory of God.

In sum, it always comes back to proper knowledge and proper love of God, of others, and of ourselves. May we all resolve to continue growing throughout 2018 as human beings, who are also sons and daughters of God, all because of His marvelous matchless grace!

On the Glory Road,

Pastor Don