

Better than 20/20 vision!

Leviticus 19^{1-2,15-18}; Psalm 1; 1 Thessalonians 2¹⁻⁸; Matthew 22^{34-end}

"You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind." This is the greatest and first commandment. (Matthew 22³⁷⁻²⁸)

One of our lads went to the optician at One Stop - he had been concerned about his vision. He came out, complaining loudly about the cost of the eye test, but declaring that the optician had said that he had better than 20/20 vision!

In the slightly off-beat way my mind works, I have always found this text very difficult. Jesus challenge is to **love your neighbour as yourself**. But what if you don't love yourself?

So many afflictions in our modern age are seen as evidence that people don't love themselves: eating disorders; self-harming; inappropriate relationships; isolation; etc, are all seen as evidence of self-loathing and that isn't loving oneself.

I am not going to engage in any amateur psychology this morning, but I am going to give you one bit of advice on how you can love yourself. It is this - try to see yourself as God sees you!

- ✦ When God sees you and me it is like looking in the mirror! We are made in God's image and he sees the people that he created to have a relationship with. He doesn't have any hang-ups about his image: when he made humans he said that it was very good - he likes what he sees.
- ✦ When God sees you and me, he sees Jesus! All of the New Testament tells us that when we accept the fact that Jesus died for our sins God sees his purity rather than our sinfulness - we are forgiven people.
- ✦ When God sees you and me he sees what he made us for being worked towards - we are all a work in progress, but God already sees the end result.

If this isn't what we see when we look in the mirror, we need to give ourselves a good talking to. Too many of us are products of an inadequate upbringing where we were taught to be negative and

critical and that there was always something more to do before we were really what our parents wanted or expected.

The trouble is that we think God is the same! He isn't!

Once you accept that God loves you it becomes easier to love God! Reciprocal love is a glorious and fulfilling thing.

Once you love yourself it is then that you can begin to love your neighbour as yourself in any meaningful way.

Paul explains just one of the results of this ability to love yourself - you don't have to compromise who you are or what you say so that others like or accept you. He is able to say **we have been approved by God!** What a confident thing to say. This is because **as you know and as God is our witness, we never came with words of flattery or with a pretext for greed, nor did we seek praise from mortals...so deeply do we care for you that we are determined to share with you that we are determined to share with you not only the Gospel of God but also our own selves.**

Leviticus is practical - loving ourselves means that we are confident enough to act as God wants us to: no injustice; not partial to the poor or deferring to the rich; no slander; no hate; no vengeance; no grudges; a willingness to reprove. That is what loving your neighbour looks like. It isn't the golden rule of treating others as you want to be treated, but treating others as God would treat them.

When you look in the mirror, how good is your vision? Do you see what God sees? That is what we need to aim to do - then loving our neighbour as ourselves becomes meaningful!