

THE SECOND GREATEST COMMANDMENT AND SELF-ESTEEM

John Makujina¹

The current practice of using the second greatest commandment—"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"—as a biblical justification for self-esteem is widespread enough to deserve closer investigation. The study of relevant biblical material reveals that scriptural data does not support modern formulations of self-esteem. Selfishness rather than self-esteem more accurately represents the forms of self-love in the passages, where self-love refers to a type of self-interest necessary for survival, one that is easily prone to overindulgence. The evangelical treatments of self-esteem, however, capitalize on the imago Dei and God's redeeming love as motivations for loving and valuing self. Methodological weaknesses in the psychological approach to the second greatest commandment are evident in several areas. An a priori commitment to modern concepts of self-love, which tends to impair careful biblical exposition, usually leads to errors in exegesis.

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INTRODUCTION

The effort to integrate psychology and Christianity encounters one of its greatest challenges when attempting to harmonize secular humanistic teachings on self-love with the biblical witness. Those in search of such an integration have for some time been compiling a modest list of Scriptures with which they intend to corroborate clinical research on self-esteem.² Among the texts quoted in support of this teaching, the second greatest commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev

¹John Makujina is a PhD student at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, and is also Lecturer in Hebrew and Greek at that institution.

²Besides the second greatest commandment, other favorites are Gen 1:26-27; 1 Sam 18:1, 3; Pss 8:5; 139; Matt 6:26; Rom 12:3.

19:18),³ is perhaps the most popular and important. The following study will articulate a leading interpretation and application of this passage by the evangelical psychological community, and then examine it in the light of sound hermeneutical principles. The discussion will take into account historical, literary, grammatical, and lexical phenomena of these texts that are so frequently neglected.

³Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are the author's.

Biblical arguments for self-esteem that do not appeal to the second greatest commandment in some form or another are uncommon. Many prominent names in Christian psychology as well as several well-known evangelical teachers have employed this Scripture in books, articles, lectures, and broadcasts as the biblical underpinning of the self-love concept.⁴ Because of this, two recognizable divisions have emerged in the psychological interpretation of the text. The first intrepidly asserts that the second greatest commandment is, among other things, a command to love self.⁵ Understandably, few integrationists have adopted this perspective. The second position, which embraces a greater number of self-esteem advocates, argues that self-love in these passages is a desirable and necessary part of the emotional well-being of every individual, but not necessarily a command.⁶ The heart of this argument lies in its definition of the word "love." Proponents assume that the love referred to coincides with the widely accepted Christian understanding of self-esteem: to deliberately love, value, and honor one's self based on one's possession of the *imago Dei* and Christ's sacrifice for that individual. In some cases word studies accompany this interpretation as proof that "love" in this context is equivalent to self-esteem,⁷ while others make the assertion without any evidence.⁸

⁴E.g., C. W. Ellison, "Self-Esteem," *Baker Encyclopedia of Psychology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1985) 1047; Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*, rev. ed. (Dallas: Word, 1988) 316; James Dobson, *Hide or Seek*, rev. ed. (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1979) 185-86; James Dobson and H. Norman Wright, "The Importance of Premarital Counseling," Focus on the Family Radio Broadcast, CS 213.

⁵Robert Fisher, "Love is Loving Self," *Church of God Evangel* (March 1992):9; Walter Trobisch, *Love Yourself: Self Acceptance and Depression* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Inter-Varsity, 1976) 8.

⁶Tim Stafford, "Don't Buy the Lie," *Campus Life* (September 1992):38; H. Norman Wright, *Improving Your Self Image* (Eugene, Ore.: Harvest House, 1983) 55; Collins, *Christian Counseling* 316; Dobson, *Hide or Seek* 185-86; Ellison, "Self-Esteem" 1047; Paul D. Meier et al., eds., *Introduction to Psychology and Counseling*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991) 143; Bruce Narramore, *You're Someone Special* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 37-38; David A. Seamands, *Healing Grace* (Wheaton, Ill.: Victor, 1989) 142.

⁷Narramore, *You're Someone Special* 37.

⁸Dobson, *Hide or Seek* 185-86.

The present investigation will focus on the second supposition, namely, that self-love in Lev 19:18 and its parallels connotes the idea of self-esteem—leaving aside the question of whether the passages contain a divine imperative to love self. Discussion of pertinent introductory matters relating to the book of Leviticus, where the command to love one's neighbor as self first appears, will initiate the discussion.

EVIDENCE FROM THE OT

Leviticus

The book of Leviticus—with holiness as its foremost theme—is a highly technical document of laws issued to govern the civil and religious life of Israel. Although Leviticus continues the legislation begun in Exodus, it forms a self-contained unit nicely dividing itself at chapter 16 (the Day of Atonement).⁹ Because Leviticus consists mainly of the Priestly Code (Exodus 25–Leviticus 16) and the Holiness Code (Leviticus 17–26), which are considered to be corrective measures for specific instances of religious failure,¹⁰ it does not constitute a complete and systematic set of instructions relating to the Israelite religious system. Therefore one should consider its regulations paradigmatic and representative, serving as principles for cases and incidents not mentioned in the inspired scroll.¹¹

The nineteenth chapter of Leviticus lies within the Holiness Code (17–26), a body of laws imposed in order to regulate the moral standards of the laity.¹² The Holiness Code also contains descriptions of annual feasts, miscellaneous laws, and covenant curses. Chapter 19 itself consists of ethical and religious laws that fall into two divisions (19:1-18 and 19:19-37), laws that stem from the thesis that introduces the section, "You shall be holy, for I Jehovah your God am holy" (19:2).¹³ The revolutionary command, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (19:18), closes the first division in chapter 19 and forms a summary statement encapsulating the specific commands concerning fellow Israelites.¹⁴ It refers to previous injunctions to leave gleanings for the poor (vv. 9-10), as well as to prohibitions against withholding an employee's wages (v. 13b), malicious gossip (v. 16), theft (v. 11), etc.¹⁵ The second division likewise contains legislation regulating interpersonal

⁹R. K. Harrison, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1969) 590.

¹⁰John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992) 344; Cf. John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, vol. 4 of *WBC* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1992) xxxii.

¹¹Brevard S. Childs, *Old Testament Theology in a Canonical Context* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985) 159.

¹²Harrison, *Introduction* 597.

¹³Sailhamer, *Pentateuch as Narrative* 349.

¹⁴Hartley, *Leviticus* 312.

¹⁵*Ibid.*

relationships, the details of which are not relevant to this article. With these introductory matters in mind, it is in order to proceed with the task of analyzing word meanings.

Meaning of Self-Love in the OT

— ('_hab)

The Hebrew verb '_hab, "to love," occurs 208 times in the OT and carries the primary meaning of "love" or "affection," with a broad spectrum of secondary meanings.¹⁶ One must resort to the surroundings of Lev 19:18 to determine the secondary sense of '_hab in that verse, a meaning that relates to the primary meaning. Fortunately, much in the immediate context can assist in understanding the specific nuance that the author wished to accompany the letters '-h-b. Since '_hab incorporates the previous commands in chapter 19 that refer to fellow Israelites, those commands by and large define its meaning.

Leviticus 19 orders the Israelite not to steal, lie, oppress another, withhold wages, curse the deaf, and place a stumbling block before the blind. It also forbids gossip, hatred, bearing grudges, and revenge. On the positive side, the chapter commands to honor parents and leave gleanings for the poor. As mentioned earlier, the regulations in Leviticus 19 are not exhaustive but illustrative; that is, they require the Israelite to do more than comply with these injunctions alone. They expect him to respond similarly in situations for which there are no specific guidelines. Moreover, because the list consists mostly of prohibitions, the self-love implied here often refers to how one would wish to be treated by another—since one can hardly rob, slander, or financially defraud one's self.

The love that is commanded covers two areas. The first is more tangible in that it entails caring for the physical and material well-being of another. The second concerns the emotional welfare of others by instructing the Israelite to care for his neighbor's reputation, honor, dignity, and happiness. Consequently, the self-love mentioned in 19:18 refers to the innate preoccupation of human beings in pursuing procedures that promote their physical and emotional well-being, whether they can achieve the outcome themselves or are desirous of that treatment from others.

¹⁶BDB, s.v. "אָב." Osborne recommends Beekman and Callow's three levels of word meaning: primary, secondary, and figurative. The primary meaning is considered to be the default or basic meaning of a word, the kind that can be identified without context. The secondary meaning is more refined, occurring in limited settings. The figurative meaning, as its name indicates, is the figurative application of a word (Grant R. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1991] 83).

Another clue to this sense of ' *hab* is in a passage which gives the same command concerning a stranger who sojourns in the land: "And when a stranger resides with you in your land, you shall not oppress him. The stranger who is staying with you shall be to you as the native who is among you, and you shall love him as yourself" (Lev 19:33-34). The nature of love expressed here prohibits mistreatment of a stranger. The verb *y_n_h*, "to oppress") refers most often to the despotic mistreatment of the poor, weak, or alien by the higher echelons of society.¹⁷ The author's analogy with the Israelites' stay in Egypt in the very next clause confirms that sense: "For you were aliens in the land of Egypt; I am Jehovah your God." Therefore ' *hab* here entails kindness, fair treatment, and perhaps even condescension to those who are disadvantaged. Further, the comparative clause "as yourself" reveals the meaning of self-love to be the inborn desire for fair treatment and charity. ' *hab* in this chapter conveys the concept of proper treatment to such a degree that it would do no injustice to the text to translate both occurrences of the verb as "treat fairly" or "care for." That proposal receives support from another study on the same topic, to which the discussion now turns.

' *hab* as "Benefit"

In a noteworthy article, Abraham Malamat contends that the English word "love" misrepresents the true meaning of ' *hab* in Lev 19:18.¹⁸ Malamat cites two reasons for his conclusion. First, ' *hab* is most often used to refer to love relationships between man and God, man and woman, and parents and children. It seldom alludes to a man's love for his fellow. Second, and more conclusive to Malamat, is the fact that ' *hab* in Lev 19:18 takes its direct object with the preposition *l_* (*l_*) rather than *l_* (*l_*), the normal particle to introduce the direct object. He explains that because "neighbor" is joined to the sign of the indirect object (*l_*) instead of the direct object ' *t* , the verb ' *hab* becomes intransitive (i.e., "to be loving toward").¹⁹ He then locates the three other instances where the preposition *l_* - precedes the object of ' *hab* : Lev 19:33; 1 Kgs 5:15; 2 Chr 19:2. He finds a major breakthrough in 2 Chr 19:2 where ' *hab* combines with *l_* - and receives further definition through its parallelism with *z* (*z* , "to help") in the preceding half verse. He remarks, "This [synonymous use] suggests that here ' *hab* means not what we would call 'love,' but rather 'to be of use to,' 'to be beneficial to,' 'to assist or help.'"²⁰ Further, he maintains that the two other instances of ' *hab* , one in Lev 19:33 and the other in 1 Kgs 5:15, support that translation. Consequently, Malamat with little hesitation suggests that the sense of love in Lev 19:18, 34, etc.,

¹⁷BDB, 413.

¹⁸Abraham Malamat, "Love Your Neighbor as Yourself: What It Really Means," *BAR* 16 (1990): 50.

¹⁹Ibid.

²⁰Ibid., 51.

is concrete and pragmatic and means "to benefit." For purposes of this essay, Malamat's approach is instructive in that it reveals that the semantic range of ' *hab* can include the idea of being practically beneficial, upholding the earlier understanding of ' *hab* in Lev 19:18, 34.²¹

Jonathan and David

One more passage in the OT alludes to Lev 19:18 and offers insight into its meaning and application. In 1 Sam 18:1, 3 the narrator describes the friendship between Jonathan and David—first explaining that the souls of Jonathan and David were bound together (i.e., they were of one mind, purpose, and outlook). Following this disclosure come two proclamations (vv. 1, 3) that Jonathan loved David as himself (lit. "as his own soul").

²¹Although most of Malamat's conclusions are convincing, especially his tactical use of ' *zar* to define the nuances of ' *hab* in 2 Chr 19:2, we must hold one or two reservations. Malamat may overstate his case when he refuses to allow the preposition *l* - the possibility of acting as the sign for the direct object. *L* - functions elsewhere as a *nota accusativi* (probably as an Aramaism), as in 2 Chr 10:6, 9, where it is used interchangeably with ' *t*. (Hartley, *Leviticus* 318). Further, verbs denoting an emotional state, such as ' *hab*, are considered loosely intransitive anyway, even with ' *t*. This is true despite the fact that this class of verbs takes a direct object, since there is no transfer of action from the subject to the object (Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* [Winona Lake, Ind.: Eisenbrauns, 1990] 366). Therefore, in this case context rather than syntax should be more determinative for meaning.

The second occurrence (18:3) is especially valuable since it explains how this love was expressed: "Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. And Jonathan stripped himself of the robe that was on him and gave it to David, with his armor—even his sword, bow, and belt" (18:3-4). That act implied that Jonathan recognized and accepted the fact that David rather than himself would succeed Saul as king.²² By surrendering to David his kingly articles, Jonathan symbolized the release of his rightful succession to the throne as Saul's son. Additionally, in light of the scarcity of weapons in Israel at the time (1 Sam 13:22), the forfeiture of his sword and bow exhibited the practicality of his love.²³

The narrator probably based his description of Jonathan's love on the commandment in Lev 19:18,²⁴ inasmuch as the historical books reveal themselves to be conscious outworkings of normative standards derived from the Pentateuch. The function of *'_hab* in 1 Sam 18:1, 3; 20:17, brings to light additional aspects of self-love not specifically mentioned in Leviticus 19. Loving self refers to the human ambition for position, status, power, honor, and success—all of which Jonathan gave to David. The author could find no deeper way to express Jonathan's love for David than to compare it with Jonathan's desire for personal success. So then, loving self in 1 Samuel 18 appends to the earlier definition the idea of desiring one's own occupational or vocational success.²⁵

One factor makes the references to self-love in 1 Samuel 18 and 20 especially

²²See also 1 Sam 20:14-15, 31; 23:17.

²³Although the covenant was mutual and benefited both, the above passages clearly reveal that Jonathan made unparalleled sacrifices.

²⁴Cf. Hartley, *Leviticus* 318.

²⁵J. A. Thompson is willing to narrow the semantic field even further by suggesting that *'_hab* here refers to a political or diplomatic friendship or benefit. Thompson marshals some impressive evidence to substantiate his theory, including the political use of the equivalent verb in Akkadian texts. We prefer, however, the phrase "occupational" success over "political," since the term "political," though appropriate here, would not apply to those who long for rank and success outside the political arena. Unfortunately, Thompson fails to interact with the powerful modifier "as himself"—which has a definite bearing on the meaning of *'_hab*—and neglects to mention any connection, whether direct or implicit, with Lev 19:18 (J. A. Thompson, "The Significance of the Verb Love in the David-Jonathan Narratives in 1 Samuel," *VT* 24 [1974]:334-38).

valuable, namely, that of forfeiture. Jonathan's expression of love toward David was only possible at his own expense. In other words, Jonathan had to abandon his natural propensity for himself to prosper and lay claim to his inheritance in order to promote David to the throne. The context of the narrative does not allow the possibility of Jonathan exalting both himself and David, since only one could succeed Saul as king. So apparent and important is this idea of brotherly love replacing self-love that the elided verb in 1 Sam 18:1, 3 could be supplied as follows: "He loved him as he would have loved himself."

So then, when the OT commands to love one's neighbor as himself, an overall understanding of what it means must include the vital ingredient of suppressing self-love to execute brotherly love. Subsequent discussion will show how the NT develops more acutely that element of self-denial.

NT USAGE OF THE SECOND GREATEST COMMANDMENT

The NT refers to the OT command to love one's neighbor as self ten times in eight passages: Matt 19:19; 22:39; Mark 12:31, 33; Luke 10:27; Rom 13:9; Gal 5:14; Eph 5:28, 33; Jas 2:8.²⁶ In every instance the Greek equivalent for ' *hab* is *ἀγαπάω* (*agapa*_, "I love"). A familiarity with the noun *agapa*_ and the popular definition of "selfless, unconditional love" should not cloud *agapa*_ here. Properly ascertaining the meaning of *agapa*_ in these self-love texts involves two considerations. The first is diachronic or historical. The historical source of the concept of self and neighborly love in all the NT texts is ultimately Lev 19:18. That makes them, in one way or another, dependent on the meaning of ' *hab* in Lev 19:18. Furthermore, that the NT writers adopted the Septuagintal reading of Lev 19:18,²⁷ whose translator considered *agapa*_ to be the most suitable rendering for ' *hab*, is important to remember. LXX translators regularly used *agapa*_ because in Hellenistic times it had developed into the standard word for love, possessing a broad semantic domain that included the sense of ' *hab* in Lev 19:18.²⁸ Therefore, *mutatis mutandis*, one should expect no difference in meaning if the NT writers had used the Hebrew text in citing Lev 19:18.

The second factor for determining meaning is synchronic, in that it takes into

²⁶Matt 5:43, "You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy," is not one of these passages because it lacks a reference to self-love.

²⁷For convenient comparative tables consult Gleason L. Archer and C. G. Chirichingo, *Old Testament Quotations in the New Testament* (Chicago: Moody, 1983) 22-23, 30-33.

²⁸The LXX preferred *agapa*_ over *phile*_ because in Hellenistic times *phile*_ came to mean "kiss" and so was taken over by *agapa*_, which became the standard verb for love (Moisés Silva, *Biblical Words and Their Meaning* [Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983] 96, citing Robert Joly, *Le vocabulaire chrétien de l'amour est il original? Φύλε_ν et Αγαπ_ν dans le grec antique* [Bruxelles: Presses Universitaires, 1968] 33).

account the context of the verb in each instance—a procedure demonstrated earlier in examining ' *hab*. These criteria will help in ascertaining the meaning of self-love in the NT.

Gospels

Matt 19:18-19

The function of *agapa* in Matt 19:18-19 seems to echo the OT meaning of "love" in Lev 19:18: "You shall not murder; You shall not commit adultery; You shall not steal; You shall not bear false witness; Honor your father and your mother; and You shall love your neighbor as yourself." The verses define love prohibitively in much the same way as in Leviticus 19. Christ describes loving one's neighbor by the fifth through ninth commandments of the Decalogue, all of which deal with interpersonal relationships. These commandments find equivalents in Leviticus 19,²⁹ with perhaps one exception. Christ introduced the sin of adultery as a violation of the second greatest commandment, by including the spouse as a "neighbor." Here again the outlawing of adultery is entirely consistent with the interdictions in Leviticus 19, because it expresses the same type of concern for the feelings of others.

Matt 22:39 and Mark 12:31, 33

Although informative in other ways, the contexts of Matt 22:39 and Mark 12:31, 33 (parallel to each other) contribute little to a knowledge of loving neighbor or self:

r r q r r r
r r r r r r r r r
r r r r r r r r

Since they, unlike the previous example, provide no lexical clues, it is safest to assume that the concept of love here is historical, depending on Lev 19:18 for its contours.

Luke 10:25-37

A similar incident with a lawyer in Luke 10:25-37 (the parable of the good Samaritan) furnishes a clear picture of how Christ perceived loving neighbor as self. The Samaritan's love demonstrated his compassion (v. 33) by administering immediate medical care and providing shelter for the victim at the Samaritan's own expense (vv. 34-35). Through this incident Christ

²⁹Compare Matt 19:18, "You shall not steal," with Lev 19:11, "You shall not steal." Also compare Matt 19:19, "You shall honor your mother and father," with Lev 19:3, "Each one of you shall honor his mother and his father." The prohibition against murder can also be added to the list if one views murder as the most serious and irreversible version of the milder forms of oppression referred to in Lev 19:14, 16, 17, 18, 33-34.

enhanced the largely "prohibitive" notion of love in Lev 19:18 with the idea of extending kindness to those who are wounded. In other words, where Lev 19:13 enjoins, "You shall not oppress your neighbor," Christ adds, "You shall help those who are already oppressed."

The aspect of forfeiture, so evident in Jonathan's love for David, is also clear in this parable since the Samaritan was inconvenienced not only in his schedule, but also in his finances. So then, Christ emphasized the obligatory³⁰ and sacrificial facets of loving one's neighbor, which are attested, though sparingly, in Leviticus 19 (vv. 9-10). The Golden Rule in Luke 6:31 includes both classifications of this love, preventative and obligatory, and expresses the same sentiments as Lev 19:18: "And just as you want men to treat you, treat them in the same way" (NASB).

Epistles

Dealing with the second greatest commandment in the epistles is slightly more complicated since the primary source of the epistolary writers in question, Paul and James, may have been the teachings of Jesus rather than Leviticus 19. That would distance the same commandment from the OT command by an added layer of text or tradition. This is most likely the case in Rom 13:9 where Paul defines *agapa* with prohibitions from the Decalogue much like those in Matt 19:18-19.³¹ The problem is not so great, however, because Christ's utterances in the gospels were entirely in cadence with the original intent and meaning of the command in Lev 19:18. Further, each of the epistolary uses provides sufficient context for contextual criteria to supersede the historical background in determining the meaning.

Rom 13:9-10

Paul's use of the command to love neighbor as self in Rom 13:9-10 scarcely differs from Jesus' command in Matt 19:19. Compare Rom 13:9-10 with Matt 19:18-19:

r r r r r
 r r r r r
 r r r r r
 r r r r r
 r r r r r

³⁰This term will be used throughout this article to specify that aspect of neighborly love that responds to needs that already exist, rather than simply indicating a refusal to do harm (preventative love).

³¹James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, vol. 7 of *WBC* (Waco Tex.: Word, 1988) 779.

The verses command husbands to love their wives according to Christ's love for the church and their love for themselves. That "self" means "body" in this passage is clear from the interchangeability of the two terms in v. 28.³³

Moreover, Paul probably derived his concept of self-love from Lev 19:18 (or ultimately so through Christ's own words), especially the command in v. 33.³⁴

This is the first and only time to appear in the Scriptures an uncamouflaged definition of self-love that does not depend upon an analogy with neighborly love for its meaning. Paul invokes a disjunctive statement, thesis and antithesis, to define self-love. He states in v. 29, "For no one ever hated his own body [thesis], but nourishes and cherishes it [antithesis]."³⁵ Concerning this statement F. F. Bruce comments, "It is natural conduct that is in view in the present context: just as a man provides for his own comfort and well-being, so he should provide for his wife."³⁶ It is clear then that self-love here consists of a person's natural desire for food, clothing, shelter, comfort, protection, etc. The husband's love for his wife, modeled on his own self-love, involves providing for her general physical well-being and so coincides with an understanding of love elsewhere in these passages.

Jas 2:8

³³Note that in v. 29 σάρξ (*sarx*, "flesh") and σῶμα (*s. ma*, "body") are synonymous. Cf. Andrew T. Lincoln, *Ephesians*, vol. 42 of *WBC* (Waco, Tex.: Word, 1990) 378.

³⁴*Ibid.*, 361; J. Paul Sampley, *'And the Two Shall Become One Flesh': A Study of Traditions in Ephesians 5:21-33* (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1971) 32.

³⁵According to Lincoln, Paul's argument to husbands proceeds as follows: "since all men love their own bodies and since a husband and wife are one flesh (body), as Gen 2:24 states, the husband is obligated to love his wife as his own body" (Lincoln, *Ephesians* 378).

³⁶F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Colossians, to Philemon, and to the Ephesians*, NICNT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984) 391.

Jas 2:8 furnishes the Bible's final clear reference to self-love in Lev 19:18: "If, however, you fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well." The concept of fairness to the unfortunate flavors the meaning of neighborly love here. To James, brotherly love entails not preferring the rich over the poor in social and economic matters. At least two connections between Jas 2:8 and Leviticus 19 are detectable.³⁷ In Lev 19:15 God condemns partiality for either the rich or poor in judgment. Also in Lev 19:9-10 God commands the Israelite to extend obligational love to the poor by leaving them gleanings from the harvest. Therefore to love one's neighbor as self in Jas 2:8 entails treating the poor as one would want to be treated if he were impoverished. Anything else would be a violation of the royal law.

DEFINITION OF SELF-LOVE

A survey of those passages in the Bible that draw from Lev 19:18 provides information to compose a working definition of self-love. Although the definition will be eclectic, combining all the data from the various passages, it will not impose every element of the meaning on each of the respective texts ("illegitimate totality transfer"). Each context determines which of the many shades of meaning an author had in mind. For example, Paul chose both the physical and emotional aspects of self-love in Rom 13:9 to modify his command, whereas in Luke 10:25-37 Christ focused primarily on the physical aspect.³⁸

Therefore self-love in these texts refers to a person's natural compulsion for his own welfare in every facet of life physical and emotional. In the physical realm, it is the characteristic that allows people to survive being an instinctive, basal motivation that does not require a lengthy decision-making process. It seeks to gain pleasure and avoid pain as a simple matter of reflex; it compels a person to eat when he is hungry and sleep when he is tired. This drive can result in an action as simple as a child flinching when pricked by a thorn or as complex as an outdoorsman building a cabin for shelter. In simpler terms, it is that unlearned, intuitive prompting that gives human beings enough sense to "get in out of the rain."

A person's love for his own physical body is rivaled only by his concern for his emotional well-being. This element of self-love within man seeks honor, position, acceptance, love, loyalty, and companionship from others. Consequently it deplores shame, humiliation, ridicule, and bigotry against self (Lev 19:14). It is also this factor that makes it so difficult for someone to

³⁷For more connections with Leviticus 19, see L. T. Johnson, "The Use of Leviticus 19 in the Letter of James," *JBL* 101 (1982): 391-401.

³⁸In defining self-love, one should remember that in many instances (especially preventative love) self-love does not refer to how an individual treats himself, but how he desires to be treated by others, since certain acts like stealing and assault are impossible to commit against self.

admit wrongdoing or confess sins. Moreover, this type of desire is most apparent when it goes unfulfilled. For instance, one seldom considers his own longing for acceptance or love until he experiences reproach, rejection, or mistreatment by others. Without self-love, no pain or disappointment would come on occasions like this. Therefore, people usually choose situations and relationships that contribute to their emotional happiness.

As is apparent, examples of both forms of self-love, physical and emotional, are limitless. Some general observations and delineations are possible, however:

(1) This kind of love is instinctive, spontaneous, and basic to all human beings everywhere (Eph 5:28-29). Consequently, this behavior does not need to be taught, developed, or nurtured.

(2) This love is not evil in itself when employed within reasonable constraints. For example, to desire food when hungry is not sinful, but to stretch the desire to excess becomes the sin of gluttony or indulgence. Neither is it wrong to expect reasonable kindness and respect from one's peers, unless it develops into a craving for popularity and attention.

(3) Loving another sometimes requires personal sacrifice and thus the abandonment of self-love, as witnessed in the cases of the good Samaritan and Jonathan's sacrifice for David.

(4) Christian discipleship may require the divestment of every form of self-love, including life itself. Cross-bearing, as described in the famous discipleship passages (Matt 10:37-39; 16:24-25; Mark 8:34-35; Luke 9:23-24; 14:26-27; John 12:25), requires that even necessary and reasonable forms of self-love such as food, shelter, friendship, love, and acceptance be relinquished to follow Christ. When Jesus announced, "If anyone wishes to come after me, let him deny himself and let him take up his cross and follow me" (Matt 16:24), he meant nothing less than renouncing the very self-love just described.

For the Christian may have to face the physical hardships of missionary service in equatorial jungles or to bear the reproaches of colleagues at work because of his Christian testimony. In other cases, a believer may have to sacrifice food and sleep when the Spirit prompts him to fast and spend long hours in intercession through the night. Again, as with self-love, the examples of cross-bearing are legion.

(5) Self-love does not refer to self-esteem as Christian psychologists claim. They base their "biblical" version of self-esteem on a calculated assessment of the Christian's worth to God as expressed by Christ's sacrifice and his possession of the *imago Dei*, both of which result in his ability to love, honor, respect, and value himself as a significant member of God's kingdom.³⁹

³⁹As noble and biblical as this concept may seem, it in effect denies God's self-sufficiency, unconditional love, and unmerited grace to sinners, since it posits intrinsic worth to man.

Moreover, most psychologists admit that self-esteem is difficult to achieve because a person must first grasp the concept, and then develop and protect it.⁴⁰ Finally, with self-esteem as the key or one of the keys to other relationships, psychologists insist that it never be relinquished.

Clearly, this definition of self-esteem does not accord with the meaning of self-love in the examined texts. Biblical self-love is common to all, Christian and non-Christian, and in neither is it based on a conscious understanding of a person's value to God or the *imago Dei*. Further, self-love is instinctive, spontaneous, and effortless. It needs no lessons, encouragement, or therapy; impulse drives it and consistency characterizes it. In contrast to what psychologists hold, the respect and honor that it entails is not from self but from others. Finally, sometimes service to others requires suppression of this love and Christian discipleship requires abandonment of it.

Source of Error

⁴⁰Wright, *Self Image* 55; Trobisch, *Love Yourself* 8.

How then does the psychological community commit an error of this magnitude so consistently? The answer lies in the unwillingness of advocates of that dogma to allow the text to speak for itself. Rather, they have imported a psychological notion and forced it into the text, without giving much consideration to the context of the passage(s). They have in every case committed the lexical fallacy sometimes known as "misuse of subsequent meaning."⁴¹ This mistake involves implanting twentieth-century ideas into ancient words and concepts.⁴² Such anachronistic readings almost always result in distorted meanings and inaccurate applications.

Bruce Narramore's word study on *agapa*, undertaken to demonstrate that the second greatest commandment refers to self-esteem, provides a serviceable example of the misdirected trajectory that analyses of this ilk often take. He summarizes his findings as follows: "Agape love is a deep attitude of esteem and respect. This is the basic meaning of Biblical self-love."⁴³ As reasonable as his conclusion sounds, under closer scrutiny it proves to be defective.

⁴¹Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral* 71.

⁴²Ibid., 72.

⁴³Narramore, *You're Someone Special* 38. Narramore's explanations are quite puzzling since earlier in the same book (pp. 21-22) he admits that the second greatest commandment has been incorrectly used to substantiate self-esteem.

To begin with, Narramore seriously jeopardizes the outcome of his thesis by teasing out two elements of the meaning of *agapa*_, "respect" and "esteem," and applying them at his convenience to the second greatest commandment.⁴⁴

In undertaking this procedure, Narramore commits the lexical fallacy known as "misuse of parallels." That error consists of determining the sense of a word by invoking only those parallel meanings that support a predetermined position.⁴⁵ Since two of the secondary meanings of *agapa*_ are "esteem" and "respect," he laminates them to *agapa*_ in the self-love texts without realizing that the nuances of "esteem" and "respect" apply only in certain contexts.⁴⁶ In doing so, he limits the semantic range of *agapa*_ to one or two meanings at best and gives the mistaken impression that the sense of *agapa*_ is resident within the word rather than its context. A survey of the many hues of *agapa*_ in major lexicons will reveal its wide semantic range and dispel any notion that it inherently refers to a special kind of divine or otherwise noble and elevated love.⁴⁷

Narramore's contrast with φιλέω (*phile*_, "I love/like") intended to show that *agapa*_ is a loftier, more responsible form of love, is also flawed, in that it makes too sharp a distinction between *agapa*_ and *phile*_. Narramore fails to realize that *agapa*_ appears in these texts because the NT writers are either directly quoting the LXX (which uses *agapa*_) or alluding to it. Nor has he considered the fact that by this period *agapa*_ was replacing *phile*_ as the standard word for love.⁴⁸ Finally, *agapa*_ and *phile*_ were often interchangeable, as in John's gospel.⁴⁹

CONCLUSION

This article has concerned itself with the question of whether loving self in Lev 19:18 and related passages coincides with modern concepts of self-esteem. Research indicates that the second greatest commandment's likeness to psychological notions of self-esteem is superficial at best and is unsupported by the collective testimony of the texts in question. Rather, the concept of self-love in these texts is inseparably bound with one's natural disposition for his own well-being, in both body and soul. Further, seriously flawed

⁴⁴Ibid., 37.

⁴⁵Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral* 73.

⁴⁶Narramore confuses the secondary meaning with the primary meaning. "Love" is the primary meaning of *agapa*_, with "respect" and "esteem" being two of the secondary meanings.

⁴⁷In 2 Pet 2:15 *agapa*_ refers to Balaam's love for the wages of unrighteousness, and in 2 Tim 4:10 Paul selects *agapa*_ to describe Demas' love for this present age. Also see Luke 11:43; John 12:43; 1 John 2:15 (BAGD, s.v. "γάπαω").

⁴⁸Silva, *Biblical Words* 96.

⁴⁹D. A. Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984) 30, 52. Also compare Luke 11:43 with 20:46, where both *agapa*_ (11:43) and *phile*_ (20:46) designate the same kind of ambition for position and recognition possessed by the Pharisees and scribes.

reformulations of lexical and contextual evidence distort the interpretation of these passages. Psychologists have allowed a resolute commitment to self-esteem as the *sine qua non* of mental health to determine *a priori* what the text will mean. Lamentably this procedure has obscured much of the true intent of this command which is to love others and has fostered needless confusion over the meaning of a passage (Lev 19:18) designed to be as easy to understand and apply as "getting in out of the rain."