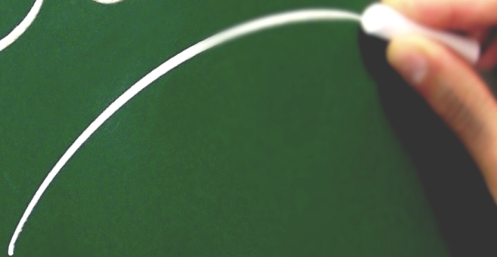


LOVE YOUR  
NEIGHBOR AS YOUR...

self



“A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.”

*John 13:34*

## Who loves whom?

I enter the Wellness Paradise. First the warm thermal pool, then an even warmer saltwater pool. Subdued music, the walls exquisitely decorated—I feel great. In the steam bath I relax further. Here I can really spoil myself—love myself.

Am I doing the right thing? Of course I am! Didn't the psychologist tell me to do this, and the minister too? And Jesus Himself said, "Love your neighbor as yourself!" (*Matthew 22:39*). So then, I must love myself before I can love others. Isn't that what it means?



### Isn't something back-to-front here?

This morning I looked out of my window at our neighbors' houses. They each have a fine house and at least one car. In the weekend they work around the home—the garden is tidied, the car washed—whose garden and car? “Mine” of course! And in the evening they treat themselves to something special—by going out for a meal, to the cinema, or meeting friends.

Who is being loved here? And for whom is the work? Who benefits from the work, and is rewarded with something “special” in the evening?

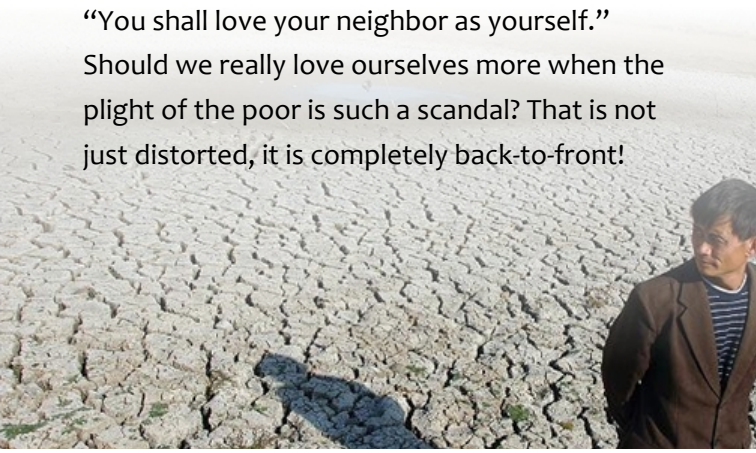
It's obvious why Jesus said, “Love your neighbor as yourself.” *Matthew 19:19*. We normally love ourselves and not our neighbor. This is what Jesus wants to change.



## A 180-degree turn!

Jesus did not say this so that we would concentrate even more on ourselves, or encourage us to do more for ourselves. According to a United Nations Organization assessment in 2008, between twenty-five and forty billion US dollars would be needed annually in order to overcome hunger in the world. Until October 2008, a mere one billion dollars had been paid. In contrast to this, the expenditure for saving the banking system in the various countries has reached dizzying heights: in the USA 700 billion dollars, in Germany 480 million Euros, in Great Britain 500 billion pounds.

“You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”  
Should we really love ourselves more when the plight of the poor is such a scandal? That is not just distorted, it is completely back-to-front!



### **My child needs something different**

In our family worship this morning I said to our young son, “Today you can buy yourself something you’d like!” And he was very happy about that. Then I asked him, “But if your daddy would take you in his arms, give you a big hug and tell you that he loves you and that he wants to do something with you instead, which would you prefer?” The answer was clear. He looked up at me just as a child looks when he really loves someone.

Then I said to my wife, “You have free access to our bank account. You can treat yourself to something.” She too gave me a look of sur-



prise. “And if I take you in my arms and tell you that I love you very, very much ...” She immediately replied, “Whenever the day starts like that then I find I can deal with the children much better.”

In *1 John 4:19* we read “We love Him because He first loved us.” God loves us with all His heart, and this is the source of our love towards our neighbor. When we know that He loves us, we can pass this love on to others.

Our children do not need to be urged to treat themselves--they have plenty of material goods already every day. What our children really need is parents and people who love them.



## A U-turn

On the American highways you can often see a sign that says “No U-turn”. It is not permitted to cross the middle line in order to turn round and drive back on the other side. But such a U-turn is just what is needed in our lives today. If we understand the admonition to “love your neighbor as yourself” as an invitation to love ourselves, then we are driving in the wrong lane. This highway leads us rapidly to ruin. This has become very apparent recently through the looming global crises. We have caused them, and it is our selfishness that lies at the root of the problem. We need to make a U-turn and completely change our direction.





“Love your **neighbor** as yourself!” Other people need my help, my money, and my time. Give to your neighbor what you have been expending on yourself. How different the world would be if this command were followed! The misinterpretation of this invitation to mean that we should love ourselves is very simply the expression of our self-centered society.

### **Jesus went one step further**

As if He foresaw what was coming, Jesus made this command even clearer in another place. “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another.” *John 13:34*. We are not only to love our neighbor as ourselves, but as Jesus loves us. Jesus gave everything that He had for us: His life, His food, His possessions, and finally His life! He did not think of His reputation or of being appreciated. The need of His fellow

human beings was the motive for all His actions. He simply loved the people of His time, and He loves us just as much today.

### **He first loved us**

“We love Him because He first loved us.” *1 John 4:19*. Is this still true today? It is a very special experience to know the love of God. He loves everyone, for there is no partiality with God. Peter realized the impartiality of God’s love during his visit to Cornelius. He said, “In truth I perceive that God shows no partiality. But in every nation whoever fears Him and works righteousness is accepted by Him.” *Acts 10:34, 35*.



### **Because I love you ...**

*When I passed my final examinations at school this opened several doors to a good career for me. But behind the scenes things were not at all rosy. Together with my mother and sister I had fled from my father into a flat that he did not know about. Under the influence of alcohol his angry outbursts had become worse and worse and we were all terrified of him.*

*Until this time I had been the well-behaved, successful child in the family. I had tried to gain the recognition and respect of my family, and others, through my achievements and obedience. But once the pressure that my father had exerted was gone, I was forced to acknowledge that the same weaknesses I so much despised in my father were also visible in my own life! No matter how much I tried to resist them I could not shake them off. And so my self-esteem crumbled more and more and my future seemed dark and*

hopeless. It was at this time that I began to pray and read the Bible for myself. One afternoon I brought my inner conflict to God in prayer and struggled to get free of the bad thoughts, feelings, and weaknesses that were tormenting me. In this situation my heavenly Father spoke to me, “Since you were precious in My sight, you have been honored, and I have loved you.” Isaiah 43:4. I could hardly believe my ears! I had expected a sharp rebuke and condemnation for what I was. But instead of this a ray of God’s holiness and forgiving love had shone into my heart. I usually find it hard to cry, but now the tears were rolling down my cheeks. Everything inside of me became quiet—the conflict was over. I felt a deep sense of gratitude towards such a loving Father who had opened the door of my prison. He is the One who makes me precious, and because He loves me I will be faithful to Him. G.C.

## **Children of the King**

It might sound like a fairy tale, but it is true. God wants to make us His children—children of the heavenly King. When I grasp and experience what God wants to do in me, I become a very different person. I do not need to love myself because I know that I am loved. The awareness of this fact draws us out of all self-condemnation and self-centeredness. God loves me, appreciates me, and wants to use me to help others. When I am filled with this love then I cannot restrain myself from passing it on to others.

## Out of the Wellness Paradise

It's time for me to leave the Wellness Paradise. It has snowed and the streets are slushy. Cigarette smoke hits me in the face. Back in the boarding house I notice how empty it is. The financial crisis is visible here as well. There is little money available for the few, but outstanding, repairs.

But didn't the psychologist say that I must love myself? And in the evening didn't the minister express the same thought?

I wish that all psychologists and ministers would never say that again. And above all, that they do not claim Jesus said it! Jesus knew that His heavenly Father loved Him, and that was why His



whole heart was in His work for others. That is what He wants for us too.

“Then Jesus said to His disciples, ‘If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.’” *Matthew 16:24, 25.*

Joachim Schwarz



Published by:

**Sabbath Rest Advent Church**

Waldstraße 37

57520 Dickendorf

Germany

E-Mail: [info@srac.info](mailto:info@srac.info)

Website: [www.srac.info](http://www.srac.info)

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