True Christianity #400

(a) Love for ourselves is wanting good things for ourselves alone and not wanting good things for others unless we benefit — not even if the others are the church, our country, any human community, or other people who live in the area. Love for ourselves also entails doing something good for others only if it benefits our own reputation, honor, and glory. If we do not see these benefits in the good things we are doing for others, we say at heart, "What's the point? Why should I do this? What's in it for me?" and we no longer bother to do them. Clearly then, if we are wrapped up in loving ourselves we do not love the church, our country, our community, other people in our area, or anything else that is truly good. We love only ourselves and our own things.

[2] (b) When we are not focusing on our neighbor or the public in the things that we think about and do, let alone the Lord, we are wrapped up in loving ourselves. We are thinking only about ourselves and our own people. To put it another way, this is our nature when everything we do is for ourselves and our own people; if we do anything for the public, we do it only to look good; if we do anything for our neighbors, we do it only so they will like us.

[3] (c) I say "for ourselves and our own people" because if we love ourselves we also love our own people — specifically our own children and grandchildren, and generally all the people around us whom we call our own. Loving them is the same as loving ourselves, because we look at them as if we were looking at ourselves and we see them in relation to ourselves. "Our own people" also includes all the people who praise us, respect us, and look up to us. The rest may look human to our physical eyes, but with the eyes of our spirit we more or less see them as phantoms.

[4] (d) Love for ourselves is what we have if we despise our neighbors in comparison with ourselves. It is what we have if we think of people as our enemies because they do not favor, revere, or adore us. We are deeper in this love if we hate and persecute our neighbors for feeling that way. And we are deeper still in this love if we have a burning desire for revenge against our neighbors and long for their destruction. If we have this nature, we eventually love to be savage.

[5] (e) We can see the nature of love for ourselves by comparing it with heavenly love. Heavenly love is a love for usefulness because it is useful; it is a love for the good things that we do for our church, our country, human society, and people in our area because they are good things to do. If, however, it is for our own sake that we love usefulness and good actions, we love them only as our drudges, because they serve us. Therefore if we love ourselves, we want our church, our country, human communities, and the people around us to serve us; we do not want to serve them. We place ourselves above them; we put them beneath ourselves.

[6] (f) Furthermore, the more we have a heavenly kind of love (we love actions that are useful and good and are moved with heartfelt pleasure when we do them), the more we are led by the Lord. This heavenly kind of love is the kind of love the Lord has; it is the kind of love that comes from him.

The more we love ourselves, the more we are led by ourselves and by our own self-centeredness. Our self-centeredness is nothing but evil. It is our hereditary evil. It is loving ourselves more than God and loving the world more than heaven.

[7] (g) The nature of love for ourselves is that the more the reins are let out — that is, the more its external constraints are removed, which are a fear of the law and its penalties and a fear of losing our reputation, respect, advantage, position, and life — the more our love for ourselves

rushes on, until it wants to control not only the entire planet but also heaven and even God himself. It never has a limit or an end.

This limitless desire for control lies hidden within all people who are in love with themselves, although it is not visible to the world as long as the reins and constraints just mentioned hold them back. The nature of all people like this is that whenever further progress upward becomes impossible for them, they stay where they are until moving up becomes possible again. This explains why people who love themselves like this are unaware that there is an insane and limitless obsession hiding inside them.

No one can avoid seeing the truth of this, however, when looking at powerful people and monarchs — people who lack reins, constraints, and impossibilities. They rush on and overpower whole provinces and countries as long as they keep succeeding. They aspire to power and glory beyond all limits. This is particularly the case with people who extend their domain into heaven and transfer all the Lord's divine power to themselves. They always crave more.

[10] (j) The evil qualities generally found in people who love themselves are contempt for others, jealousy, unfriendliness toward people who do not favor them; a resulting hostility; and various kinds of hatred, vengefulness, guile, deceit, ruthlessness, and cruelty. Where you find evils like this, you also find contempt for God and for the divine things that are the true insights and good actions taught by the church. If such people honor these things, their respect is only verbal, not heartfelt. Because evils like these are present, related falsities are also present, since falsities come from evils.

The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Teachings #97

It is often said that we are neighbors to ourselves, meaning that we need to look after ourselves first. However, teachings on caring tell us how we should understand this.
We all need to make sure that we have the necessities of life, such as the food, clothing, housing, and more that are necessary for whatever civic life we are involved in. We need to provide these not only for ourselves but also for our dependents, and not only for the present time but also for the future, since unless we acquire the necessities of life for ourselves we are not in any condition to extend caring to others; we ourselves are instead in need of everything.

The New Jerusalem and its Heavenly Teachings #98

The following example may show how we are to be neighbors to ourselves. We all need to provide our bodies with their food and clothing. This needs to come first, but the object is to have a sound mind in a sound body. Further, we all need to provide food for our minds, meaning things that build our intelligence and wisdom, but the object is that our minds will be able to be of service to our fellow citizens, our community, our country, the church, and therefore the Lord. If we do this we are providing for our well-being to eternity. We can see from this that what should come first is the purpose for which we do something, because everything depends on that.

It is also like building a house. First we need to lay the foundation, but the purpose of the foundation is the house, and the purpose of the house is living in it. If we think being neighbor to ourselves is actually the most important thing, this is like regarding not the house or living in it but the foundation as our final goal. But in reality, from start to finish, living in the house is the true goal, and the house and its foundation are only means to this end.