

## Loving Oneself

Do you love yourself? This may sound like an odd question to you for two reasons. Some people love themselves to the point of exclusion to loving anyone else. Others are of the opinion that to love oneself is sinful. Certainly, it is possible to love yourself in a sinful way but it is also possible to love yourself in a righteous way.

Jesus responded to a man's question one day concerning the greatest commandment. After stating that we were to love God with our total being, he then remarked, "The second commandment is similar to the first. You are to love your neighbor as you love yourself." The master did not tell us to hate ourselves and instead love our neighbors. No, he said we are to love our neighbor in the same way and in the same degree as we love ourselves.

There is a real principle of life here – we can only love and care for the other person to the same degree that we have experienced love ourselves. To truly love another person, we must love ourselves in the right way.

Scripture does warn us concerning our sinful nature and condemns any love of the sinful self. Since no good thing dwells within our evil selves, it is a proper object of spiritual hatred. Jesus said that he who loves his life, loses it, and he who hates his life in this world will keep it for eternal life. We are not to love our human depravity.

Yet the Bible does teach that even sinful, fallen man is in some sense good. He is still the image bearer of God, although that image is effaced. So we find that murder and cursing other men is wrong because men are made in the likeness of God. Whatever mankind has within that is in some sense good and noble should not be despised but affirmed and loved.

**What then is proper self-love?** *For one thing, we ought to care for ourselves and have self-respect.* Appreciation for God's created good within us is morally necessary. Men and women should respect their own lives and the divine image within them. So we ought to love ourselves because in some respects we are like God. We are very imperfect image bearers, yet this is our dignity and glory. To hate one of God's creatures, especially one made in his likeness, even if it is one's own self, is to hate God indirectly.

*Proper self-love is right because men ought to love themselves since this forms the basis of their love for others.* You cannot properly love others unless you properly love yourself. This is an observable fact in human interpersonal relations. The people who have the most trouble with showing care, warmth, and love for others are those that do not love themselves. They suffer from low self-esteem and a reduced sense of self-worth. In turn many times this is linked to the lack of their experience of love in their formative years.

Man is not to love himself just for the sake of loving himself. This is egoism. No, he loves *himself for the sake of loving others*. Cultivating this kind of self-love will enable us to love others better.

*Proper love of oneself is also related to our ability to love God better.* The Bible teaches that loving other people is a way in which we love God. Thus, the highest motivation for the cultivation of proper self-love is loving self for the sake of loving God better.

*We should properly love ourselves because we are creatures made in God's image and he cares for his creation.* There is a kind of general love that God has for all humankind. This is referred to as "common grace" and refers to the undeserved sovereign benefits experienced by all without distinction between believers or unbelievers. The psalmist says: *The Lord is good to all, and his mercy is over all that he has made.* Psalm 145:9

Jesus gives two practical examples of how God loves even his enemies in Matthew 5. "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous." If you do this "then you will be acting like your Father in heaven "(Matthew 5:45).

Paul voices this truth in his sermon in Lystra found in Acts 14. *In past generations he allowed all the nations to walk in their own ways. Yet he did not leave himself without witness, for he did good by giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, satisfying your hearts with food and gladness.*" Acts 14:16-17

We who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, should properly love ourselves because we are the object of God's special love for those he chose in Christ before the foundation of the world. The New Living Translation of Ephesians 1:4-6 powerfully expresses this reality. *Even before he made the world, God loved us and chose us in Christ to be holy and without fault in his eyes.* <sup>5</sup> *God decided in advance to adopt us into his own family by bringing us to himself through Jesus Christ. This is what he wanted to do, and it gave him great pleasure.* <sup>6</sup> *So we praise God for the glorious grace he has poured out on us who belong to his dear Son.*

The Lord Jesus gives voice to such love in his prayer before he went to the cross.

*"I have revealed you to those whom you gave me out of the world. They were yours; you gave them to me and they have obeyed your word.*

*<sup>9</sup> I pray for them. I am not praying for the world, but for those you have given me, for they are yours.*

*<sup>20</sup> "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message,*

*<sup>24</sup> "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. (John 17:6,9 20,24)*

It is these same ones that Jesus refers to in John 10:11, *I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.*

*<sup>19</sup> We love Him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19*

This is what Paul means when he writes: *Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,* (Ephesians 5:25)

Here is the main point as those related to God through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ: *We should properly love ourselves because God loves us.* Even when we were sinners who had not yet responded to his love, God regarded us as a pearl of great value. While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us! He looked upon with a purpose to save us by the blood of Christ and came seeking us. If God loved us before he saved us, how much more does he love us now as his adopted sons and daughters. God says that he knows the thoughts that he thinks toward us and they are thoughts of peace and of true provision for our needs. A Christian has experienced the special love of God. He has found that he himself is an object of divine love and redemption. This love is a love that will never cease. If God so loved us, then we ought to love ourselves as His precious people and seek to return that love to Him and to share it with others. In the light of this truth, we are to love Yahweh our God with all our heart, our soul, our mind and our strength. Listen to this declaration- *For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love.* Romans 5:5 Thus, It is through his Holy Spirit that we experience God's love and return our awaken love to him. As an object of God's special love chosen in Christ Jesus you may properly love yourself by loving him most.

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