

## AM I SUPPOSED TO LOVE MYSELF?

"I guess I don't love myself. How can I love anybody else if I don't love me?" This was the conclusion that Susan\* had come to in trying to understand her state of chronic unhappiness. Her hoped-for antidote would be to simply learn to think and act in a way that would make her feel good about herself. "Don't you agree?" She asked confidently. "No, I'm afraid I don't, Susan. I believe that will only lead to more unhappiness. I know it sounds right, but it isn't God's way. Would you like to know His solution?"

Self-love is an appealing message. It sounds good; it even sounds biblical. After all, aren't we supposed to love our neighbor as ourselves? Isn't this the Golden Rule? With the help of secular, humanistic psychology, this concept is being touted as the cure-all for modern man. Many are fully convinced that if a man can learn to love himself more, bolster his self-esteem or improve his poor self-image, then he can overcome his problems. Barring war, famine, or full-scale economic depression, he can experience true fulfillment, satisfaction and happiness.

Is this correct? God says no! He has made it unmistakable clear that a preoccupation with self only intensifies man's unhappiness. It becomes one of the main roots of his depression and other emotional and behavioral problems. Scripture is other-oriented, not self-oriented. It emphasizes self-denial rather than self-enhancement; self-sacrifice as opposed to self-love. Self-love, according to Christ, is not a virtue but a potential vice. Yet in spite of the clarity of God's Word, a self-centered gospel continues to be promulgated even among conservative, evangelical Christians. John Piper, an assistant professor of Biblical Studies at Bethel College has commented, "Today the first and greatest commandment is 'Thou Shalt Love Thyself.' He rightly complains that today the "Ultimate sin is no longer the failure to honor God and thank Him but failure to esteem oneself." 1

Contrary to what humanistic psychology teaches, love for God and our neighbor does not proceed from self-love. It comes from God Himself. John declares in his first epistle, "We love, because He first loved us" (4:19). The biblical order is this:

1. God love individuals.
2. As they receive His love, they love Him, and as they love Him,
3. They love other people.

Secular humanism, however, has distorted the "great commandment" and teaches a new order:

1. Love yourself, so that,
2. You can love others,
3. And God.

The Bible plainly teaches that self-love already exists in each of us. When Jesus said to love your neighbor as yourself, he meant, "as you already do." He did not even consider that people might not love themselves. "As thyself" is a given, not a third commandment. What about those who commit suicide? Don't they hate themselves? The answer is no. People commit suicide from loving self enough to cup off pain of living, or the frustration of responsibility, or the disappointment of not being good enough in terms of their own aspirations.

The trend to "love oneself" is clear proof that we are living in the last days. Paul wrote: "But realize this, that in the last days difficult times will come. For men will be

lovers of self, lovers of money, boastful, arrogant, revilers, disobedient to parents, ungrateful, unholy, unloving, irreconcilable, malicious gossips, without self-control, brutal, haters of good, treacherous, reckless, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God; holding to a form of godliness, although they have denied its power” (2 Tim. 3: 1-5). Paul is saying that self-love produces sin rather than love for God or our neighbor. The answer for troubled people cannot be “love yourself.”

What then is the alternative? Self-hatred? No. It is to love God more than anyone or anything else and to love others as much as we already love ourselves. While it is certainly an unpopular message today in light of the current admonishments to work toward self-worth and self-esteem, God’s Word promises that if we will follow His way we will discover real peace, joy, and happiness. May God give you His grace as you attempt to obey Him.

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1 John Piper, “Is Self-love Biblical? Christianity Today. 12 August, 1977. p,6.