

Spiritual Growth Lessons

LESSON 8 of 32

♥ LOVING OURSELVES ♥

"And Jesus answered him, The first of all commandments is, Hear, O Israel; The Lord our God is one Lord: And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment. And the second is like, namely this, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. There is none other commandment greater than these" (Mark 12:29-31).

"So husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies; he that loveth his wife loveth himself" (Ephesians 5:28).

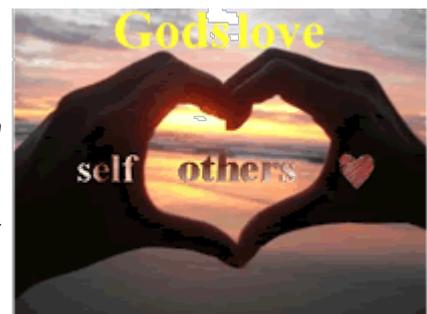
Perhaps it will come as a surprise to some people that according to the above verses of Scripture, we are to love ourselves. It is God's will for us to do so, because we cannot love others until we learn first to love ourselves (possess self-esteem and self-respect).

THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SELF-LOVE AND SELFISHNESS

When we use the term "self-love" in this lesson, we are not referring to the kind of self-love pictured by the Apostle Paul: *"This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God" (1 Timothy 3:1-4).*

This kind of love is selfish and egotistical. People with this kind of problem usually have an unrealistic view of themselves because of extreme self-preoccupation.

The self-love or self-respect that is spiritually, physically, and mentally healthy for us begins with an awareness that God loves us, and He doesn't make junk! Solomon, one of the wisest men who ever lived wrote, *"He hath made every thing beautiful in his time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11).* After God created all things--including mankind, *"God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good . . ." (Genesis 1:31).*



Even though we are all disciples "in the making," it is very important for us to realize that God loves us just as we are. A few years ago, a minister's wife gave a beautiful testimony. She admitted that she was a very normal human being, capable of a wide range of feelings and possessing faults. However, as a pastor's wife, she had tried to mask those faults, not only from others, but also from God.

One day she became tired of her pretension. She knelt down before the Lord and began to tell Him about her real self. When she finished pouring out her heart to the Lord, she said, "And now, God, since You know what kind of person I really am, I suppose You don't love me." How surprised she was at the immediate answer from God, "Why, the very person you have just described is the one that I do love--the real you!"

Do you suppose that the image of yourself that you try to project to others is the

person that God recognizes and loves? If so, you are mistaken. God loves the real you. He loves you now, just the way you are. His love is without stipulations. It is not based upon conditions of performance. He knows that we have many faults, but he did not come into this world to condemn us. He came to save us and give us abundant life. He is making something beautiful out of us. We are His children, His chosen, special people. We can love ourselves--because Jesus love us!

It is a well-known fact that many of the dark and devious sins of this world are committed by people who have lost all respect for themselves. When you truly have a healthy self-image, when you can accept yourself as you really are--you will be free to forget yourself and reach out to others with the love of God. Does that sound like a paradox? Nevertheless, it is true. When we lack self-love and self-respect, we are too preoccupied with our own feelings and guilt to really think of others.

I am still in the growing process. I am not always warm and lovable. In fact, sometimes I am just plain grouchy! At such times my wife will often say to me, "Why don't you love yourself so that you can love me?" I hold my peace, because I know that she is right! My ability to truly love my wife is based upon my ability to accept and love what Jesus is doing in my life. *ds*

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