

# It Is Not a Sin to Love Yourself

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Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then face to face. Now I know in part; but then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known. (*1 Corinthians 13:12 NIV*)

When the melancholic dejectedly desires to be rid of life, of himself, is this not because he will not learn earnestly and rigorously to love himself? When a man surrenders himself to despair because the world or some person has left him faithlessly betrayed, what then is his fault except that he does not love himself the right way. (Søren Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*.)

There is so much written in the Bible about how important it is to love others, I can't help but think the great writers assume we all have a reservoir of self-love from which to draw. But this is not true. Some Christians are not battling too much self-esteem, they are struggling to love themselves at all. Why is this so?

I have studied this problem for many years, and it is clear to me that young children cannot love themselves. Instead, they must be validated by the people around them if they are to build a sense of self-worth. Love and attention are the most important forms of validation. Unfortunately, some children do not receive the nurturing they need to thrive.

Once children have low self-esteem, it begins to feed on itself. Due to their poor self-image, children are incapable of accepting the small doses of love their parents do provide, or the love of other people they may meet as they are growing up. This results in more shame and low self-esteem.

There are numerous ways that low self-esteem might impact a person's life. Some people will feel a sense of worthlessness, while others will have illusions of grandeur to compensate for a poor self-image. Some people will lack ambition, while others will become over-achievers. Many people will become people pleasers, while others will go to the other extreme and become anti-social.

While understanding what went wrong is important, it is even more helpful to know what Christians can do about low self-esteem. How does one "love himself the right way," as Soren Kierkegaard puts it. Here are some suggestions:

- If you see in a mirror darkly, it is important to take another look. This time look for the face of Jesus Christ in the mirror. "Look full in his wonderful face." Now you will see the love and tenderness you did not get as a child. This will give you a second chance to take outward validation and turn it into an inner sense of self-worth. Please note that this

only works with the unconditional love of Christ. As an adult, you cannot get this from another human being. You cannot return to the womb and be born again to loving parents. And your spouse, child or best friend cannot act as a substitute for the lost parent. This time you must be “born of the spirit.” (*John 3:8 NKJ*)

- Once you have been re-born to the love of Christ, give yourself permission to love yourself. Christ did not want us to love others without the satisfaction of loving ourselves. He said, “You shall love your neighbor *as* yourself.” (*Mark 12:31 NKJ*) Not more than—or less than—but *as much as*.
- Surround yourself, whenever possible, with a community of people who affirm you—people who like you just the way you are. When you were a child you had little choice about the people in your life. Your family and school-mates were forced upon you. And for psychological reasons, you may have gravitated towards people who validated your weaknesses rather than your strengths. As an adult, you can choose your companions more carefully.
- Stop trying to be perfect. No one is perfect. When Paul asked God to remove the thorn in his flesh I think he was asking to be made perfect. All God said to him was, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” (*2 Cor 12:9-10 NKJ*) Look at it this way, we all live in the shadow of God’s perfection and are perfectly imperfect.
- Stop comparing yourself to others. You are special in your own way and this is the attitude you should have about yourself.
- Stop competing with others. You are not a winner because you display mastery over something. You are a winner because God has chosen you and brought you into fellowship with him.
- When you sin, you should not only pray for forgiveness but you should *accept* God’s forgiveness which is freely given to you. This is why Christ died on the cross. Do not dishonor this great sacrifice by holding on to guilt.
- If you hurt someone, make amends. Turn a guilty conscience into the satisfaction to doing the right thing. Harmony with your fellow human beings enhances your newly-found self-esteem.

To many of us, self-esteem comes later in life as a gift from Jesus Christ. But it is a gift worth waiting for. And from this gift will come great things. First and foremost, it will allow you to love others in a deeper and more meaningful way. True charity is the passing on of the love we have received from Jesus Christ which has been nurtured within. So seek out the love of Christ, keep some for yourself, and then pass it on.