

We Are Allowed to Love Ourselves

Franklin Church of Christ
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Introduction:

A man, supposedly in his late 40s, wrote this in an online forum:

"I hate what I see in the mirror. I hate my past. I hate my present. I hate everything I am. I go to bed every night wishing I would wakeup with some disease and only have a few months to live. Or that I would die on the way to work in a car wreck or have a massive heart attack. That would show them wouldn't it. Would anyone really care if I was gone? I walk around feeling empty inside and nobody notices. Why can't anyone see how sad I am? Can't anyone see how much pain I am in? Can't anyone see me struggling to stay alive? I hate myself even more for having these thoughts. How weak is that? Why can't I be a real man and get over it? I ask myself if this is a cruel joke God is playing on me? Is this pay-back for all the bad I had done in my life? Why am I here? I am so pathetic and such a loser."

The responses this man received were not much better.

"You and me both. I know how you feel. Every day I wake up hoping to die. I've been through a lot ... in my lifetime. Most of the time, I don't see what the point of living is. At university, everyone ignores me. No one cares about me. Most of my family hate me. I have no friends...I'm not even my won friend."

"I know there are people who love me, but it doesn't make a difference to me. I feel like you. I'm a loser."

"Bro, I feel so close to you. I hate myself and I hate myself that I hate myself in the same time. I don't know how to feel or what to feel. Sometime I blame life and gods but then I hate myself that I should just blame myself. I hate myself more than I hate this meaningless life. I hate my boring look, my stupid brain, my weak body, and my ugly mouth that always say the wrong things."

"I go through life pretending I am so happy, but if anyone even cared they'd look deeper. And even though I am female, I totally understand how you feel. They all say life is a rollercoaster, but it feels like it is only going down and down further each day."

Somebody on the thread finally wrote:

"GOD LOVES YOU! Nothing is more important than that."

To which the next commenter responded:

"I wish I could believe in that premise, but I'm finding it hard these days. I have failed at everything I've ever done and tried. At the same time, I've done nothing wrong. I've been a hard-working blue collar guy all of my life. I've never broken a law or hurt anyone. Now, at 47, laid off from my job nearly a year, a wife of 19 years who looks at me like a loser. No kids. Little savings. The only thing I truly love are my two dogs who are always faithful.

"I look back and conclude that my life has been pointless. Utterly meaningless. I hate myself so much, that I love my own honesty about it.

"I hate myself so much that I pray for death. I am a 30-year smoker and am happy about it. Lung cancer, colon cancer, a massive coronary all sound good to me. I'll take any of them. Then I can go down for the long sleep and all of this...would be over. No more worries. No more insomnia or nightmares. Not another morning waking to nothingness. Worthlessness. Pain.

"The only reason I haven't put a bullet thru my head is because of the last remaining shred of Christianity, that suicide is the ultimate sin from which there is no forgiveness. So, I'm finding it harder to believe that God is here, or cares. I have sinned like all humans on this planet and regret them all. But, if he's there, he's forsaken me. I guess I don't blame him. I would too if I were him."¹

Self-loathing and self-hatred: Some of us have it down to a science. Some of us are even convinced we are more spiritual because of our negative feelings toward ourselves. We are sure that any kind of love we have for ourselves would only be selfishness, self-centeredness, arrogance. We are sure that any kind of love we might have for ourselves would mean we weren't seeing ourselves in the sinful light we are sure we must recognize. I'd like to share a Biblical revelation with you. We are allowed to love ourselves.

¹ These quotes were copied and pasted from an online forum I wish to keep nameless. The only editing done was to cut out potentially offensive language.

Some hearing this will think this is no big deal and wonder why I'm even reading such depressing stuff in today's lesson. Others are saying they know how these people online feel and want to find out where this stuff came from. They are saying, "Are you sure? Are you sure I'm allowed to love myself? If you knew me like I do, you wouldn't be saying that." I'm talking to you this morning. God says you are allowed to love yourself.

Discussion:

- I. We are allowed to love ourselves.
 - A. Some look at their sins and equate their existence with their sinfulness. They don't just despise their sins, they despise themselves for their sins. I understand that. With each new sin, no matter how small or great, it is just another reminder of how worthless and unlovable we are. Some look at their bodies. They see themselves as too thin or too fat, too tall or too short, too plain, too out of proportion. They equate their body with themselves and hate themselves a little more every time they look in the mirror. Some want to be perfect and every mistake adds another level of loathing. Some look at how they've treated others and the mistakes they've made there. Every time they see someone they've hurt, they heap punishment on themselves. Then, they come to church and see everyone wearing their Sunday smiles, and hate themselves a little more for not being strong and perfect like everyone else. For some, "hate" and "loathe" may be too strong of terms. But how do you talk to yourself? Do you call yourself names? Do you talk down to yourself? Do you punish yourself over and over again? If you treated someone else the way you treat yourself, would anyone mistake it for love then? Maybe your feelings aren't as dark as those we read from the internet, but are you treating yourself the way God wants you to?
 - B. I know the struggle with these feelings. But then I read **Matthew 22:37-40**. The two greatest commandments are, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." The second is very similar, Jesus said, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." I've read these commands before. I've been in classes about them. I've preached sermons about them. But on a gut, emotional, core value level, I missed something about these verses. There are two commands about love, but there is a third statement about love within them. It is not a command because it is simply assumed. We are supposed to love our neighbors as we love ourselves. **Ephesians 5:28-29, 33** makes this exact same assumption. Do not miss the profound nature of this. Not only are we allowed to love ourselves, we are supposed to love ourselves. Loving ourselves is the foundation for loving others properly. If we despise ourselves, loathe ourselves, and hate ourselves, we will not be able to love others properly or in a healthy way. The sad reality is too many of us do love others exactly the way we love ourselves, we hate ourselves so we hate others. Not only are we allowed to love ourselves and supposed to love ourselves, these verses demonstrates that God expects us to love ourselves.
 - C. If you are laboring under the continued delusion that you are not allowed to love yourself or that you are unlovable, think again. You are lovable. God expects you to love yourself. You are allowed to do so.
- II. How to love ourselves properly.
 - A. For the many who have spent a great deal of time hating yourselves, this sounds shocking and you wonder how you can possibly do this. In fact, you are probably sure if you try, you will simply fall headlong into the sins of arrogance, selfishness, self-centeredness. Further, you may have an intellectual idea about how to love yourself but no practical idea about what that would look like.
 - B. **I Corinthians 13:4-7** provides the pattern. I've often encouraged people to add their names into this verse wherever the word "love" is found and ask if it is true. For instance, "Edwin is patient and kind..." I've even encouraged folks to take this to a new level by asking them to add someone else's name after each statement. For instance, "Edwin is patient with Marita..." Today, I want to encourage you to add your name in both places. For instance, "Edwin is patient with Edwin." If you can't say these things truthfully, then while you may not say you hate yourself as strongly as those who wrote the posts we started with, you aren't loving yourself God's way. Look at each of these guidelines and how they will come to fruition in your life when you love yourself properly.

1. *Be patient with yourself:* Did you sin this week? I did. I know I did. When that happens, whether large or small, I begin to think this is all pointless. I'm never going to make it. Why keep trying? Or perhaps you are trying to improve on a job and having trouble. Maybe you are working on a skill that is taking you a long time and you feel worthless because you aren't as good as you want to be or as someone else is. If you are like me, you have a tendency to look at the clock and the calendar as a threat, a series of deadlines to get done with something in time or else you are a failure. That is simply not true. Time is not your enemy; time is your friend. According to **II Peter 3:9**, God is being patient with you, be patient with yourself.
2. *Be kind to yourself:* You are allowed to be good to yourself. You are allowed to say nice things to yourself. You are allowed to look at yourself in the mirror and say you look nice. You are allowed to look at yourself in the mirror and say you are smart. You are allowed to compliment yourself. You are allowed to do nice things for yourself. You are allowed to reward yourself for a job well done. You are allowed to take care of yourself. This one is the hard part for many of us Christians. We have so emphasized putting others before ourselves that we think taking care of ourselves is selfish. But think about what the stewardess on your last plane ride told you. If the cabin depressurizes and the masks drop down, put yours on first, then help those around you. Why? Because often times, if we don't take care of ourselves properly, we can't take care of others properly. Are you tired? Get some rest. Does your body need food? Eat. Do you need some alone time with just you and God? Take it. The world won't fall apart while you take the time to be kind to yourself. Your friends won't die if they have to wait for you to call them back. Your children won't grow up to be on Dr. Phil because you decide you need to eat breakfast before helping them with something. Even Jesus took time to be kind to Himself and take care of Himself. In **Matthew 14:22-24**, He sent the apostles ahead on the boat at evening time. However, a trip that should have taken perhaps a few hours, was taking them all night. It wasn't until after 3 AM that Jesus came to them. Jesus was kind to Himself and took care of Himself. Then He was able to provide what the apostles needed. Yes, there is a time and place for self-sacrifice. But there is also a time to take care of yourself. You are allowed to be kind to yourself.
3. *Do not envy:* Much of our self-hatred comes from envying others. Because we see others as better than us, we hate ourselves. Don't compare yourself to others. Don't envy others. We have no idea what each person is going through or what they have to deal with. They have their mistakes, faults, and sins, just as we do. There is no reason to envy because we have all sinned and fallen short of God's glory (**Romans 3:23**).
4. *Do not boast or be arrogant:* This is the part that helps us see a godly love for self is not being self-centered. Some folks compare themselves to others and become envious. Some compare themselves to others and become arrogant (think of the Pharisee in **Luke 18:11**). Comparing ourselves to others whether it leads us to think less of ourselves or more is not love either for others or for ourselves. Feeling better about ourselves at the expense of others is shallow and provides no lasting comfort or satisfaction. In fact, it is only setting us up to hate ourselves more when we see others with whom we feel we don't compare.
5. *Do not be rude to yourself:* Some translations say don't behave in an unseemly manner or in an unbecoming manner. This refers to being indecent. I struggled with how this might apply in our lesson today until I searched that online forum we started with and read of a woman who so hated herself that she was looking for love in any way she could get it. Her answer was to commit sexual immorality with "dirty OLD men." That story could be repeated over and over again by different people with many different sins. They hate themselves so they drink. They hate themselves so they commit gluttony. They hate themselves so they shoot up. One of the ultimate acts of loving ourselves is to realize that we don't have to be indecent with ourselves or toward others. We can choose to behave decently. We don't have to sabotage our lives by committing some sin. We can love ourselves instead and choose God's way.
6. *Do not insist on your own way:* Once again we see that loving ourselves in a godly way does not mean selfishness or self-centeredness. When we love ourselves we remember **Proverbs 14:12**, that there is a way that seems right to us, but it ends in death. When we love

ourselves, we surrender ourselves to God's way knowing that His way works. We don't have to follow our path to death, we can follow His path to life. We are allowed to do that.

7. *Do not be irritable with yourself:* That is, don't be provoked with yourself or exasperated with yourself. I've been told that anger turned inward is a working definition for depression. You don't have to carry that low-level irritation with yourself just because you aren't where you wanted to be or haven't done what you wanted to do. Your house may be a mess; you don't have to heap anger on yourself about it. Your job may not be going the way you want; you don't have to heap anger on yourself about it. You may have messed up again as a spouse or parent; you don't have to berate yourself with anger and exasperation. Have you ever angrily said to yourself, "What is wrong with you?" You don't have to heap that on yourself. Certainly, there is a time for self-evaluation and self-improvement. I'm not saying live in fantasyland and act like you're perfect. You're not. I'm simply pointing out that you are allowed to be gentle with yourself about where you are. Even Paul was able to be gentle with himself about his weaknesses because he realized that was why he knew he needed Jesus (**II Corinthians 12:10**).
8. *Do not be resentful with yourself:* The NASB translates this "does not take into account a wrong suffered." Resentment is carrying a grudge against past wrongs. When bad things happen to me I often tell myself how much I deserve it because of all the wrong things I've done. If I start thinking I might actually be good at something or have done something right, I fear that I'm getting arrogant and self-centered and remind myself of all the wrong I've done. I've had to learn that I am not the sum total of my sins. I've done many wrong things, but that doesn't mean that my mere existence is wrong. I don't have to drag all my baggage with me for the rest of my life. According to **Psalms 103:8-14**, God is not carrying His anger over our sins, rather He has cast our transgressions as far from us as the east is from the west. If God is not holding our baggage of sin over our head, why should we? Don't get me wrong, we need to remember our sins enough to learn from them and remember that we need Jesus, but we do not have to carry the shame and resentment against ourselves keeping a tally of all the rotten things we've done so we can think about how rotten we are. We don't have to resent ourselves.
9. *Rejoice at truth, not wrong-doing:* **Romans 1:18** and **2:8** help us understand this contrast. Paul spoke of those who suppressed the truth in unrighteousness (same word as translated "wrong-doing" in **I Corinthians 13:6**). He also spoke of those who did not obey the truth, but obeyed unrighteousness. In these passages, there are two systems to which we can submit ourselves: God's truth or unrighteousness. This juxtaposition demonstrates that unrighteousness is a lie. It is false. When we love ourselves we rejoice in what is true and real according to God, His word and His will. Sadly, sometimes we rejoice in what isn't real. Satan lies to us, promising us many things if we pursue his unrighteousness. Remember how he promised Jesus to rule the kingdoms of the world in **Matthew 4:8-9**. He is a liar, but sometimes his lies distract us. We can rejoice in vengeance, gossip, slander, outbursts of wrath, immorality, cheating, lying. We can envision a fantasy world of great things if we pursue unrighteousness. When we actually love ourselves, we stay anchored in the real world of God's truth and dismiss unrighteous fantasies. We rejoice in God's truth, even if following it isn't always easy or fun.
10. *Bear all things and Endure all things:* We face a lot of things in this life. Some of them are not so good. Sometimes, we may believe we just aren't going to make it and decide to give up. However, when we love ourselves, we keep on keeping on. We recognize that today is another day God will take us through because we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us (**Philippians 4:13**).
11. *Believe all things and Hope all things:* Sadly, when we are living in our fears and self-hatred, we are convinced nothing good should happen to us. Therefore, we tend to catastrophize our future, believing everything is going to go wrong, believing we deserve punishment and hardship. When we love ourselves in a godly way, we live with an optimism that remembers God is going to make everything work out for our good (**Romans 8:28**). We believe and hope all things about the future recognizing God is going to take care of us. It is okay to see a bright future for yourself. That doesn't mean bad things will never happen in the meantime,

but it is recognition that no matter what is going on now, God is going to take care of us and we can smile at our futures.

Conclusion:

Even having looked at all of these principles, we may still look at our bodies, our minds, our hearts, and our souls and believe they simply aren't lovable. We may think that all of this is nice talk but really doesn't change anything. I hope you and I can learn to understand that we have a very good reason to love ourselves despite everything we know about ourselves. We need to remember that God knew everything about us too. God knew how much we would weigh. God knew what we would score on our SATs. God knew who we would marry. God knew what job we would have. God knew what house we would live in. God knew what friends we would have. God knew how we would treat the people in our lives. God knew what mistakes we would make. God knew what flaws we would have. God knew what sins we would commit. God knew everything you know about yourself and probably even more. Do you know what God did with all of that? He loved you. He loves you even now. He proved that love by sending Jesus to die for you (**Romans 5:6-8**). Further, I want you to know that I love you. I don't know everything about you, but I can guarantee you there is not anything you can tell me about who you are and what you've done that will change the fact that I love you. I obviously can't speak for everyone else within this assembly, but I firmly believe that no matter what you reveal about yourself that this assembly will still love you as well. God loves you. We love you. Will you love you?