

Loving Ourselves in the Love of God

I. REVIEW: THERE ARE 5 STAGES TO GROWING IN LOVE

- A. The foundational premise in this teaching series is that God loves us with the same intensity that God loves God (Jn. 15:9; 17:23). This quality of love is foundational to life in God's kingdom.
- 9“As the Father loved Me, I also have loved you; abide in My love.” (Jn. 15:9)***
- B. The love burning in God's heart has at least 5 expressions that are deeply interrelated. Each of these expressions represent the 5 stages of how a believer can grow in love. We seek to understand and walk in all 5 stages simultaneously since they are revealed and imparted to us by the Spirit.
1. ***God's love for God***: Each person in the Trinity intensely loves the others with all their heart.
 2. ***God's love for His people***: He loves His people with all of His heart, mind, and strength.
 3. ***Our love for God***: God's very own love is imparted to His people by the Spirit (Jn. 17:26).
 4. ***Our love for ourselves***: We love ourselves in God's love and for God's sake.
 5. ***Our love for others***: We love others in the overflow of experiencing God's love (1 Jn. 4:19).
- C. ***Stage 1*** is to receive increased understanding of the perfect love that is found in the relationships within the Trinity. The Son loves the Father (Jn. 14:31), and the Father loves the Son (Jn. 3:35; 5:20; 15:9; 17:23). We best understand God's love as we consider the Trinity. Why? The way that God loves within the Trinity is the *only* way that He loves us—*He always loves in fullness*.
- D. ***Stage 2*** is to receive increased understanding of the love that God has for us (Eph. 1:17; 3:18-19).
- E. ***Stage 3*** is to receive an increased impartation of love for Jesus. Jesus prayed that the Father's love would be imparted to us (Jn. 17:26). The Lord created us to love Him in 4 spheres of our life—our heart (affections and desires), soul (identity), mind (intellect), and strength (resources).
- 26“...that the love with which You [the Father] loved Me may be in them...” (Jn. 17:26)***

II. STAGE #4 LOVING OURSELVES IN THE VERY LOVE THAT GOD HAS FOR US

- A. The redeemed are to love themselves in God's love and for God's sake. We will never love others more than we love ourselves by the grace of God. We are to see and love ourselves through the lens Jesus' love for us, His work on the cross, His great “investment” in us, and our great value to Him.
- 39“And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Mt. 22:39)***
- B. The Bible calls us both *to love ourselves* (Mt. 22:39) and *to hate our lives* (Lk. 14:26).
1. *We love who we are in Christ*—our new identity in Christ and what we do in God's will.
 2. *We hate our lives*—who we are outside of Christ and what we do outside of God's will.

- C. The premise of loving ourselves in God's grace is to *agree with what God sees*. He sees the eternal story of our lives in His family—not only our temporal story that is flawed with sin and weakness.
- D. You are a new creation in Christ who received the gift of God's righteousness (2 Cor. 5:17, 21). You are to love the "new creation" person—in whom God delights, who possesses the Spirit, and who has a glorious destiny in God both in this age and in the age to come.
*¹⁷Therefore, if anyone is **in Christ**, he [our born-again spirit] is a **new creation**; old things have passed away...all things have become **new**...²¹He made Him who knew no sin to be sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God... (2 Cor. 5:17, 21)*
- E. Seeing ourselves with our new identity, destiny, and worth in God's love empowers us to love ourselves in God. Seeing these truths greatly changes how we feel about ourselves and our lives.
- F. We are to view ourselves in terms of who we are in Christ, while acknowledging our fallenness—thus, we simultaneously love and hate our life. The gospel emphasizes our dignity in Christ yet calls us to self-denial. Seeing this tension clearly equips us to walk in love more consistently.
- G. We *love* who we are in Christ and *hate* who we are and what we do outside of Christ. Thus, we rejoice in our identity and life in Christ yet deny our actions and attitudes that are contrary to Him.
²⁶"If anyone...does not hate ...his own life he cannot be My disciple." (Lk. 14:26)
²⁴"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross." (Mt. 16:24)
- H. Bernard of Clairvaux spoke of *the blessedness of loving oneself in God and for God's sake*—that is, to be jealous to be all that He called us to be for His sake. Humility is to agree with God. We are not to walk in false humility that minimizes how much *He enjoys loving us* and how He wants us to *enjoy being loved by Him*. We magnify God as we love ourselves in agreement with His love for us.
- I. We pray to receive greater insight into the truth that we are His inheritance—to see His desire for us and His investment in us. We love ourselves for God's sake, so He fully receives His inheritance in our lives. I often pray, "Lord, let me see what You see and feel what You feel about my life."
*¹⁷...Father of glory may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him,
¹⁸the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know...the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints... (Eph. 1:17-18)*
- J. How can we say with assurance that the Lord delights in His people and enjoys loving them? Because the Scripture declares it repeatedly. He wants us to *enjoy being loved by Him*.
⁴But you shall be called Hephzibah...for the LORD delights in you... (Isa. 62:4)
¹⁹He delivered me [David] because He delighted in me. (Ps. 18:19)
⁴For the LORD takes pleasure in His people... (Ps. 149:4)

¹⁸Who is a God like You?...He delights in mercy. (Mic. 7:18)

1. He wants us to enjoy how much He enjoys us. We are to love all those whom God loves, including ourselves. He wants us to love “the person” that He loves when He looks at us.
 2. The Lord wants us to enter into the feelings that He has for us so that we love ourselves in the love of God. Transformation occurs in us as we agree with what He sees and feels about us.
- K. Every person was created with a longing to be enjoyed by God. Our greatest emotional need is to walk in the assurance that we are enjoyed by God, even in our weakness.
- L. Jesus shocked Israel when He declared that the Father enjoys His people even in the process of rescuing and restoring them to relationship with Him. In Luke 15, Jesus told three parables which reveal God’s personality and how He rejoices over us (Lk. 15:4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 23, 24, 32).

***⁵“When he has found it [the lost sheep], he lays it on his shoulders, rejoicing...⁶he calls together his friends...saying to them, ‘Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost!’...
³²‘We should make merry and be glad, for your brother was dead and is alive again...’”
(Lk. 15:5-6, 32)***

III. GOD’S UNIQUE PLAN FOR EACH BELIEVER’S LIFE IS GLORIOUS

- A. God created each of us in a unique way as His workmanship (Eph. 2:10).

¹⁰We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works... (Eph. 2:10)

- B. David saw God’s “works” or leadership in his life as wonderful and marvelous (Ps. 139:14). We trust Jesus’ leadership related to the *unchangeable* aspects of our life—our appearance, parents, family heritage, ethnicity, gender, giftings, limitations, deficiencies, our mental, emotional, physical, and financial capacities, life circumstances, our ministry assignment (even if it is small), etc.

***¹³You formed my inward parts [physically, emotionally, mentally]...¹⁴I will praise You, for I am....wonderfully made; marvelous are Your works, and that my soul knows very well...
¹⁵I was skillfully wrought in the lowest parts [mother’s womb]... (Ps. 139:13-15)***

1. By faith David saw his limitations and difficulties as working for his good (Rom. 8:28). He saw beyond his limitation and embraced God’s good story that was unfolding in his life.

²⁸And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God... (Rom. 8:28)

⁶The lines [my life circumstances] have fallen to me in pleasant places... (Ps. 16:6)

2. The redeemed are to agree and confess that they are crowned with glory and honor.

⁵And You have crowned him [the redeemed] with glory and honor. (Ps. 8:5)

- C. *We are loved by God and we are lovers of God; therefore, we are successful* (in the primary sense). Aspects of self-hatred comes from seeing our worth and success according to the flesh or by measuring (evaluating) our lives by the values of this age and comparing ourselves to others. We can imitate the dedication of godly people without desiring their call or life circumstances.
- ¹²*They, measuring [evaluate] themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise. (2 Cor. 10:12)*
- D. We must not regard or evaluate and define ourselves according to the flesh or according to how we look or how much money, influence, or gifting we have, but see our success and value in Christ.
- ¹⁶*...we regard no one according to the flesh...*¹⁷*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation...* (2 Cor. 5:16-17)
- E. To live “according to the flesh” includes agreeing with the enemy’s false narrative about our life. To live “according to the Spirit” includes agreeing with how He sees us in identity in Christ.
- ⁵*Those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit, the things of the Spirit. (Rom 8:5)*
1. To set our mind on the things of the flesh includes more than *vices* like lust, anger, greed, etc. It includes agreeing with a dark narrative about our lives and living from a secular identity.
 2. To set our mind on the things of the Spirit includes more than *virtues* like love and purity, etc. It includes agreeing with His narrative about our life and how He sees and feels about us.
 3. Those who live according to the flesh are easily preoccupied with themselves—they struggle continually with rejection and feeling like a failure and, thus, long to be someone else.
- F. The Lord desires to liberate hearts from self-hatred so that people do not wish they were someone else but are thankful for who He made them to be and with the story that He is unfolding in them.
- G. Believers who hate themselves live with so much emotional traffic that comes from being preoccupied with their image and what they think people are thinking about them, etc.
1. Feelings of self-hatred damage one’s ability to receive and return love.
 2. We cannot love Jesus or others well if we are overwhelmed with “emotional traffic” consisting of feelings of self-hatred, rejection, insecurities, comparisons, bitterness, etc.
- H. The enemy seeks to convince us that our life is a failure and that it is irrelevant and useless.
1. Jesus remembers and rewards every act of obedience, even giving a cup of water (Mt. 10:42).
- ⁴²*Whoever gives one of these little ones only a cup of cold water in the name of a disciple, assuredly...he shall by no means lose his reward.” (Mt. 10:42)*
- ¹⁷*Well done...you were faithful in a very little, have authority over ten cities. (Lk. 19:17)*

2. Most of our love and service to Jesus consists of small acts. But they move His heart, and He will reward us forever for them.
 3. We must receive what the Word says about the activities we do in God's will—though many of them are small and are not recognized or celebrated by others.
- I. When we know that His eyes are on us, then we do not have to strive to get people to recognize our accomplishments, insights, ministry impact, etc. We do not need to get the time and attention of powerful and popular people because *we already have the attention of the most glorious Man.*