

## Self-Esteem

- I. The following definitions are relevant to this study.
- A. self-esteem: Favourable appreciation or opinion of oneself.
  - B. esteem: (v) To estimate the value of, assign (a value) to; to value, assess, appraise. In favourable sense: To regard as valuable; to think highly of; to feel regard for, respect.
  - C. esteem: (n) Estimate, valuation, in phr. **to make an esteem**. b. Estimated value, valuation. c. **to put, set (an) esteem, a high, low esteem upon**: to set a value upon, cause to be esteemed (highly, etc.). In favourable sense: Favourable opinion; regard, respect.
  - D. value: Worth or worthiness (of persons) in respect of rank or personal qualities.
  - E. worthy: Of sufficient merit, excellence, or desert to be or have something.
  - F. self-conceit: One's opinion or estimate of oneself; esp. high or exaggerated opinion of oneself, one's talents, attainments, etc.
  - G. narcissism: Self-love and admiration that find emotional satisfaction in self-contemplation.
  - H. self-love: Love of oneself;...regard for one's interests or well-being; chiefly with definitely opprobrious implication, self-centredness; selfishness.
  - I. contemplate: To behold at with continued attention, gaze upon, view, observe.
  - J. pride: The quality of being proud. A high or overweening opinion of one's own qualities, attainments, or estate, which gives rise to a feeling and attitude of superiority over and contempt for others; inordinate self-esteem.
- II. This study is meant to counter a false sense of personal value, identity and security (self-esteem) which is a substitute for and a rival to the true sense of personal value, identity and security that comes from Jesus Christ.
- A. The Biblical route to personal fullness is by assigning value to Christ. **REV 5:12**.
  - B. The Biblical route to personal fullness is by deeming Christ to be the fullest man and thus having a high opinion of Him and striving to be more like Him. **COL 1:18-19; EPH 4:13**.
  - C. The Biblical route to personal fullness is by self-denial, not self-esteem. **MAT 16:24-25**.
    - 1. Jesus Christ is the great model of self-denial.
    - 2. He made Himself of *no reputation*. **PHIL 2:7**.
    - 3. He came to serve, not be served. **MAT 20:28**.
    - 4. He denied His own will in favor of the Father's. **JOH 6:38; MAT 26:39**.
    - 5. He denied Himself the sensual pleasure of marriage.
    - 6. He denied Himself the royal dignity that a King should expect. **MAT 21:5**.
    - 7. He, the Sinless One, washed the feet of His sin-riddled disciples. **JOH 13:12-14**.
    - 8. He denied Himself the intervention of mighty angels. **MAT 26:53**.
    - 9. He denied Himself more than half of the days appointed to sinners. **PSA 90:10**.
    - 10. If the one sinless Man Who had every claim to every right and privilege should so deny Himself, how much more should we do so who are full of sin and "...did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted" (**ISA 53:4**)!
- III. One can have a favorable sense of value about himself from:
- A. modifying or eliminating internal values that hinder one's self-image. Redefine good and bad. Move the goalposts. Lower the bar. Dispense with notions of sin and guilt.
  - B. deeming others to be inferior. This is how the Pharisee operated. **LUK 18:9**.
  - C. marginalizing or eliminating those whom he deems superior. This was Cain. **1JO 3:12**.
  - D. clamoring for and achieving success in those things that others deem important. This is the love of men's praise. **JOH 12:43**.

- E. seeing himself as God sees him: corrupt and condemned by nature but redeemed and renewed by grace unto works which please God (**EPH 2:1-10**), and the approval which accordingly comes from Him. **1SAM 2:30; COL 1:9-12.**
1. This is a vital point of identity.
  2. To see oneself as nothing but a worthless worm loved by nobody is the stuff of self-destructive behavior, whether it be by negative thoughts and actions or by compensating by false positives such as seen above.
  3. To see oneself as forgiven and loved by God, fitted with a new nature filled with good potential to please Him is the stuff of hope, joy, peace and satisfaction from being and doing good. **PRO 14:14.**
  4. We are not told to think nothing of ourselves but every man is told, "...not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think..." (**ROM 12:3**).
- IV. For at least a generation, poor self-esteem has been touted as the basis of all of man's problems individually and societally.
- A. Modern psychology has played up self-esteem.
1. Psychologist Abraham Maslow believed that self-esteem was a universal need and that, if met, would produce desirable civic and social consequences.
  2. The notion is that if people had a better self-image, they would not be struggling with self-conflicts and would be less likely in conflict with others or be handicapped by long-held norms of behavior or performance.
  3. Associated with this thinking are such social and educational experiments as "outcome-based education" which essentially makes non-achievers feel better about themselves, and makes achievers feel that diligence and effort are futile.
  4. Even some in the Christian community have been on the self-esteem bandwagon, such as Dr. James Dobson.
  5. The gossamer optimism of New Age thinking (the "all is one" and "upward reach of mankind" philosophy) not only accords with the self-esteem dynamic, it can be traced to it: "Perhaps the most influential ideas to shape contemporary new age thinking were those that grew out of humanistic psychology and the human potential movement of the 60's and 70's."  
(Adolf, Jonathan; The 1988 Guide to New Age Living)
- B. Self-esteem psychology basically holds that the individual has within himself all the resources needed to solve his problems. The individual must believe in himself, ignore hindering voices that limit his potential and tap into his own hidden potential.
1. The assumption is that man is basically good.
  2. Instead of sinners being called to repentance, men are merely called to awaken their potential.
  3. Mind that the hidden potential in man is "...the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience" (**EPH 2:3**).
    - a. "...the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth..." (**GEN 8:21**).
    - b. It was because of this potential that God separated mankind at Babel. **GEN 11:6-7.**
  4. When man looks within himself to find solutions to his problems instead of looking up to God, he is playing into the hands of the devil.
- V. Remember that Lucifer's fall was owing to his pride, his *inordinate self-esteem*. **1TI 3:6.**
- A. He was made the perfection of beauty. **EZE 28:12.**

- B. He was the music minister of heaven. **EZE 28:13.**
- C. He was "...the anointed cherub that covereth..." (**EZE 28:14**), the highest angel.
- D. Yet he had a higher opinion of himself than was warranted: he esteemed himself suited to be God (**ISA 14:12-14**). He obviously was not lacking in self-esteem!
- E. Advancing oneself by self-esteem is following a poor model.

VI. Mind how atheistic "goo-to-you" evolution has actually contributed to the declared lack of a sense of personal value.

- A. If we are all simply the objects of random chemistry and physics that have no direction or defined purpose, and a very short lifespan in the overall scheme of things, then what is the point of life?
- B. If man is nothing more than a lucky higher form of algae, then he has no special place in nature, no uniqueness. He has no more inherent value than a maggot.
- C. The denial of God, an eternal soul, an afterlife, and the equating of all life as being nothing more than a constant struggle of the strong feeding on the weak is the stuff of futility and purposeless existence. Is it any wonder that some people resort to complete hedonism, drugs, alcohol, self-mutilation or suicide?
- D. Take away from man a sense of eternity, of hope, of purpose and convince him that he is only an animal, is it any wonder that he has no sense of personal value?
- E. Mind that Scripture teaches that:
  - 1. there is an eternal God to Whom all the creation is indebted.
  - 2. man was uniquely made in the image of God and invested with dominion over the earth. **GEN 1:27-31.**
    - a. He has more value than plants. **JON 4:10-11.**
    - b. Jesus said, "...ye are of more value than many sparrows" (**MAT 10:31**).
  - 3. man has an eternal soul which continues after death and it is that destination for which he should prepare. **LUK 16:22-23.**
  - 4. man has a defined purpose: pleasing God. **REV 4:11.**

VII. If low self-esteem is as important as the world says it is, where is the emphasis on it in Scripture?

- A. Scripture is void of commanding or recommending self-esteem.
- B. Scripture does, however, teach that we should esteem:
  - 1. God highly. **DEU 32:15.**
  - 2. God's word. **JOB 23:12; PSA 119:128; 138:2.**
  - 3. others better than ourselves. **PHIL 2:3.**
  - 4. pastors. **1TH 5:13.**
  - 5. the reproach of Christ. **HEB 11:26; ACT 5:41.**
- C. Consider **LUK 16:15.**
  - 1. This was spoken to the Pharisees. **LUK 16:14.**
  - 2. They had all the resources for self-esteem.
    - a. They were achievers. **MAT 23:15.**
    - b. They thought well of themselves. **LUK 18:9.**
    - c. They were esteemed by others. **MAT 23:7; ACT 26:5.**
  - 3. They were not lacking in self-esteem.
  - 4. But they were abomination to God!
  - 5. Paul, the former Pharisee, came to God's conclusion about himself. **PHIL 3:5-8.**
- D. Consider the lack of attitude of self-worth in:
  - 1. Jacob. **GEN 32:10.**

2. Gideon. **JDG 6:15.**
  3. Job. **JOB 42:6.**
  4. Isaiah. **ISA 6:5.**
  5. John the Baptist. **LUK 3:16.**
  6. the centurion. **LUK 7:6-7.**
  7. the prodigal son. **LUK 15:21.**
  8. Paul. **ROM 7:18, 24; 1CO 15:9-10.**
- E. Jesus Christ did not cater to self-esteem. **MAT 7:11; 15:25-28; 19:17.**
- F. Whereas we are told to not think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think (**ROM 12:3**), where are we told to not think of ourselves more lowly than we ought to think?
- G. Scripture rather calls us to *lowliness of mind* and *humbleness of mind*.  
**PHIL 2:3; COL 3:12.**
1. It is with lowliness and meekness that we endeavor to "...keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (**EPH 4:1-3**).
  2. A sure-fire way of not having this unity is by being *puffed up*, as was Corinth. **1CO 4:6, 18-19 c/w 1CO 1:10; 11:19.**
- H. Jesus Christ is the model of meekness and lowliness (**MAT 11:29**) Whose mind we are to imitate. **PHIL 2:3-7.**
- I. The Scriptural path to greatness is through humility. **PRO 15:33; 18:12; 22:4; 29:23.**
1. Who was justified, the Pharisee or the publican? **LUK 18:9-14.**
  2. Remember that Lucifer and his ilk are big on self-exaltation. **2TH 2:4.**
  3. God gives grace to the humble. **1PE 5:5-6.**

VIII. Consider other warnings against the importance of self.

- A. We are to not be wise in our own *conceit* (personal opinion, judgment or estimation).  
**PRO 26:12, 16; 28:11; ROM 11:25; 12:16.**
- B. We are to avoid *vainglory* (glory that is vain, empty, or worthless; inordinate or unwarranted pride in one's accomplishments or qualities; disposition or tendency to exalt oneself unduly; idle boasting or vaunting). **GAL 5:26; PHIL 2:3.**
1. Consider **JER 9:23-24.**
  2. How much of our culture is defined by perceived superiority in academics, finance and sports?
    - a. The foolishness and weakness of God is wiser and stronger than men. **1CO 1:25.**
    - b. God owns everything, distributes it at His pleasure, and takes it away at His pleasure. **1CH 29:11-12; JOB 1:21.**
    - c. He gives or deprives His creatures of wisdom. **PRO 2:6; JOB 12:20; 39:17.**
    - d. He "...taketh not pleasure in the legs of a man" (**PSA 147:10**).
    - e. Consider how quickly proud Nebuchadnezzar fell. **DAN 4:30-33.**
    - f. We are fools to glory in what we have received as if we had not received it. **1CO 4:7.**
    - g. (**Gal 6:3**) For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself.
  3. We ought rather to glory in our God and His ways. **JER 9:24; 1CO 1:30-31.**
  4. Paul would only glory in the cross of Christ which was the ultimate example of the superior wisdom of God and exaltation through humility. **GAL 6:14; 1CO 2:7-8; PHIL 2:8-9.**

- C. We are not to commend ourselves. **2CO 10:17-18.**
1. (**Pro 27:2**) Let another man praise thee, and not thine own mouth; a stranger, and not thine own lips.
  2. (**Rom 15:18**) For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed,
  3. We are warned against commending ourselves by measuring ourselves against others' opinions and works. **2CO 10:12.**
  4. (**Pro 20:6**) Most men will proclaim every one his own goodness: but a faithful man who can find?
- D. We are to avoid vanity. **EPH 4:17; COL 2:18; PSA 119:37, 113; PRO 30:8.**
1. vanity: That which is vain, futile, or worthless; that which is of no value or profit.
    - 3.a. The quality of being personally vain; high opinion of oneself; self-conceit and desire for admiration.
  2. vain: Devoid of real value, worth or significance; idle, unprofitable, useless, worthless; of no effect, force, or power; fruitless, futile, unavailing.
  3. Contrast these definitions with the definition of *esteem*.
  4. Now consider the words of **PSA 39:5-6; 144:3-4**. Did the Psalmist derive self-esteem from the fact that God took knowledge of him?
- E. We are also warned about undue emphasis on the outward appearance, which is a form of vanity. **PRO 31:30; 1PE 3:3-4.**
1. In Isaiah's day, the daughters of Zion were judged for defining themselves by their appearance. **ISA 3:16-24.**
    - a. haughty: High in one's own estimation; lofty and disdainful in feeling or demeanour; proud, arrogant, supercilious. (Of persons, their action, speech, etc.).
    - b. mince: intr. To walk with short steps or with affected preciseness or nicety; to walk in an affected manner; to show affectation or affected delicacy in manner of gait.
    - c. The WAY one looks or acts is sending a message: it is a form of communication! **ISA 3:9; PRO 6:13.**
    - d. The message these gals were sending was not that they lacked self-esteem, but rather *self-denial* and *self-examination* (examination of oneself with regard to one's conduct, motives, etc., esp. as a religious duty).
    - e. Having discretion is more important than outward beauty. **PRO 11:22.**
  2. This is not a problem that is unique to women. Absalom was praised for his beauty but his beauty was only skin deep. **2SAM 14:25.**
    - a. Absalom was noted for his luxuriant hair. **2SAM 14:26.**
    - b. Absalom wanted to let everyone know that he was the cream of the crop. **2SAM 15:1.**
      - (1) Good looks ran in David's family. **1SAM 16:12.**
      - (2) But so did David's poor parenting skills. **1KI 1:5-6.**
      - (3) "Those parents know not what they do who indulge a proud humour in their children; for I have seen more young people ruined by pride than by any one lust whatsoever." (Matthew Henry)
    - c. Absalom's self-esteem was his problem, not his solution. He was a narcissistic, egotistical sociopath that rode to political power on looks, charisma and eloquence.
    - d. "It was probably his personal beauty that caused the people to interest

themselves so much in his behalf; for the great mass of the public is ever caught and led by outward appearances.” (Adam Clarke)

3. Scripture also condemns effeminacy in men. **1CO 6:9.**
  - a. effeminate: Of persons: That has become like a woman. a. Womanish, unmanly, enervated, feeble; self-indulgent, voluptuous; unbecomingly delicate or over-refined.
  - b. It is utterly inappropriate for a man to primp, preen, or prance as a delicate woman might do.
4. If we overvalue our outward appearance to the neglect of our inner character, where will we be if God *turns our comeliness into corruption*?  
**DAN 10:8; PSA 39:11; JOB 17:1.**

- IX. The first characteristic of the perilous times of the last days is love of self. **2TI 3:1-5.**
- A. The love of self is the basis of the other sins listed here.
  - B. People who are driven by self-love will trample on whatever gets in the way of their own desires.
  - C. The end (satisfaction of one's own desires) will justify the means.
  - D. Consider how self-love relates to the other sins.
    1. *Covetousness* is when you can't stand not having the possessions, looks or attainments that another has because you measure fullness of being by such things.
    2. You *boast* to appear superior to others and gratify your desire for attention and fame.
    3. Your *pride* is the stuff of self-love and self-esteem. Chances are that perceived low self-esteem is simply the product of the tension between what we or others think about ourselves and what our pride will not accept.
    4. Men will *blaspheme* God because they deem Him less important than themselves and because He denies them their desires somehow.
    5. *Disobedience to parents* is along the same lines: authority that gets in the way of personal interests
    6. *Unthankfulness* is because you will not give credit to anyone but yourself for the things you deem valuable.
    7. *Unholiness* is nothing less than the satisfying of oneself by sin.
    8. Being *without natural affection* is because you value the satisfying of your own desires to the exclusion of any perceived obstacle to the same.
    9. *Trucebreakers* deem that their current peace is worth less than getting what they want.
    10. *False accusers* destroy others whom they perceive to be superior to themselves or who are getting in the way of their own desires.
    11. *Incontinence* (lack of self-restraint, chiefly with reference to sexual appetite) needs no explanation.
    12. The *fierce* man may react thus to the frustration of his will or desire, or use fierceness to obtain his will or desire.
    13. *Despising those who are good* is owing to the fact that they make you look bad and you cannot stand it.
    14. *Traitors* betray others when maintaining trust with them gets in the way of one's own desires or ideals.
    15. The *heady* man (the man who is impetuous, headstrong, etc.) has no time for decorum or other's well being in the pursuit of his own goals.

16. The *highminded* man (one having or characterized by a haughty, proud, or arrogant spirit) loves his own perceived superiority over others and shows it.
  17. *Loving pleasures more than God* needs no comment. It is the antithesis of the character of Jesus Christ. **ROM 15:3.**
- E. Self-love is NOT commanded in **MAT 22:37-40.**
1. This passage sets forth TWO commandments, not THREE.
  2. Love originates with God not with self. **1JO 4:19.**
  3. The intensity with which God is to be loved is with the entire being.
    - a. To love one's neighbor with this intensity would be idolatry.
    - b. God must be loved MORE than oneself or one's neighbor. **LUK 14:26.**
  4. Self-love is not the subject of the second commandment; it is the qualifier.
    - a. The commandment assumes that men love themselves.
    - b. Scripture in general assumes this. **EPH 5:29.**
    - c. The love of self is as built-in to man as the involuntary acts of heartbeat and breathing.
    - d. The second commandment is teaching us to direct the innate love we have for ourselves outward to others.
  5. This passage actually condemns a love of self that exceeds love of God and disregards one's neighbor.
  6. Loving my neighbor as myself means treating him as I would want him to treat me. **LUK 6:31.**
  7. The love that Jesus commands looks beyond ourselves and is not limited by the personal benefit we may derive from it. **LUK 6:32-34; JOH 15:12-13.**