

# Self Esteem - A Biblical Approach

*Notes from Bro. Stephen Hill's seminars*

## ***Miserable Sinners and Victorious Conquerors – The Biblical Principles - Rom. 8***

### **1.1 What is “self-esteem”?**

“Esteem” is ‘to think favourably of, regard as valuable’ (Concise Oxford Dictionary); or from the Latin ‘to value, appraise, estimate’ - specifically ‘to have great regard for; value highly; respect.’ (Webster’s New World Dictionary – Second College Edition)

Therefore “self-esteem” is to consider oneself to be valuable. It “involves a self-evaluation.” Gary R. Collins, *Christian Counselling,* page 314.

The Christian community is strongly divided on the subject of self-esteem. Some of this is due to the use of terms that are confusing or that are used in different ways. On the one side we have ‘feel-good’ evangelist Robert Schuller:-

"Self-esteem is pride in being a human being." "Self-esteem is feeling good about one's self because one has been working hard and well." "Since the opposite of good self-esteem is that in a person which caused him to say 'I am unworthy,' (which, says Schuller, is the worst sin that a man or woman can commit), self-esteem is the feeling, 'I am worthy.'" These quotations are taken from Schuller's book, *Self-esteem: The New Reformation,* Word Books, 1982 extracted by David J. Engelsma, *Is Good Self-Esteem Important for a Christian, and How Is It Developed?*

As we shall see this does not reflect the Bible’s teachings.

The conservative side of Christendom however sees the “self-esteem” movement as promoting selfishness and self-centredness, and as a sinful focussing on oneself. We too would wish to avoid these.

“Embracing a positive image of self will not, in the long run, make any difference, because I am still wrapped up in myself. I simply become a self-centred sinner who is trying to like himself. Even if I feel bad about myself and do not like myself, I am still focussing on myself, and ‘myself’ is the problem. The corrupted condition of my human ‘self’ is not a mere figment of imagination which can be adjusted by thinking differently.” Don Matzat, *Christ Esteem,* page 71

Where then can we go but to the Bible?

### **1.2 Is “self-esteem” an important issue?**

The well-known Christian psychologist James Dobson observes:-

"Lack of self-esteem produces more symptoms of psychiatric disorder than any other factor yet identified." James Dobson, *'Hide or Seek'*

He has, in particular, found that low self-esteem is the most troubling problem indicated by the majority of women. *'What wives wish their husbands knew about women.'*

"Many years ago Alfred Adler, a European psychologist, wrote that everyone has feelings of inferiority. Adler believed that we can only escape this inferiority trap by stopping the comparison of ourselves with others and by giving up the common desire to be superior." Gary R. Collins, *'Christian Counselling,'* page 313.

### **1.3 What about psychologists?**

Psychologists can help as long as we realize that some are agnostics or atheists, and therefore may at times contradict the Bible's teachings. Even if they are Christian there are various views on 'Christian psychology' as illustrated above.

All knowledge can be useful but we must sieve it for truth consistent with revelation. Psychology can help us to understand how we think and act, and show us techniques to improve. It cannot however save us, nor must it ever over-ride God's message to us.

### **1.4 Are we valuable?**

"Are not two sparrows sold for a cent? And yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Therefore do not fear; you are of more value than many sparrows." (Matt. 10:29-31) – all quotations are from the NASB.

But how does God consider us of value?

We have been chosen by God as His elect (e.g. 1 Peter 1:2). We may be amazed and puzzled by this fact, even disbelieving, but it is nonetheless true!

Consider this list (not exhaustive):-

Psa. 23:4 – God is with us.

John 3:16; 1 John 3:1; 4:19 – God loves us.

Rom. 5:10 – we are reconciled to God.

Rom. 8:32 – God has given us Christ.

Rom. 8:37 – we are conquerors.

2 Cor. 1:3 – God comforts us.

Eph. 1:3 – we have blessings in the heavenlies.

Eph. 2:5,8 – we have been saved by grace.

Phil. 4:6-9 – we are at peace.

Col. 1:14 – we are redeemed and forgiven.

1 Peter 5:7 – God cares about us.

1 John 2:1 – Jesus is our advocate (and judge!).

1 John 3:21; 5:14 – we have confidence in God.

1 John 4:10 – Jesus is our propitiation (brought into God's favour, by Him).

## **1.5 But shouldn't I feel wretched?**

The Bible portrays human nature as exceedingly wicked. A few examples:-

Jer. 17:9 – ‘the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick.’

Mark 7:20-23 – ‘that which proceeds out of the man, that is what defiles the man.’

Rom. 3:10 – ‘there is none righteous, not even one.’

Rom. 7:11 – ‘for sin, taking opportunity through the commandment, deceived me, and through it killed me.’

So wicked is our nature that Paul describes our situation as one of conflict:-

Gal. 5:17 – ‘for the flesh sets its desire against the spirit, and the spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please.’

From this passage and Rom. 7 and 8 it is evident that there are two “me”s. There is the “me” that is my human nature from birth to death, and there is the “me” that is in Christ, saved and redeemed.

Rom. 8:2 – ‘Christ Jesus has set you free from the law of sin and death.’

Rom. 8:9 – ‘you are not in the flesh but in the spirit.’

## **1.6 But what about my doubts and fears?**

Some conclude that because they do not feel assured or act with confidence, they are unacceptable to God, and will not be in the Kingdom. Firstly we should be clear that the Bible does recognise our inadequacies, for example:-

Psa. 103:13-14 – ‘for He Himself knows our frame: He is mindful that we are but dust.’

Isa. 66:2 – ‘but to this one will I look, to him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word.’

Matt. 5:3 – ‘blessed are the poor in spirit.’

Matt. 14:31 – ‘O you of little faith, why did you doubt.’

Mark 4:19 – ‘the worries of the world.’

Mark 9:24 – ‘I do believe, help my unbelief.’

2 Cor. 2:7 – ‘overwhelmed by excessive sorrow.’

2 Cor. 3:5 – ‘not that we are adequate in ourselves to consider anything as coming from ourselves.’

2 Cor. 4:7-9 – ‘but we have this treasure in earthen vessels.’

## **1.7 What does baptism achieve?**

Paul describes our baptism as an engagement to Christ:-

2 Cor. 11:2 – ‘for I betrothed you to one husband, that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.’

Since we have been engaged to Christ we like any couple should be preparing for our marriage. This is as intimate a relationship as is possible to imagine or describe! It tells us

that we are desired beyond our wildest imaginings. He intensely desires our companionship and affection. And this is the message we are to take to the world!

At baptism we were saved:-

Rom. 8:24 – ‘for in hope we have been saved.’

Eph. 2:5, 8 – ‘by grace you have been saved.’

## 1.8 The Problem of Certainty

**Brother Duncan Heaster states that none of the accepted will think they ought to be in the Kingdom. He elaborates as follows:-**

“We should believe that we really will, surely be saved; indeed, that we are already saved, in prospect, and are in embryo already the Kingdom of God. It’s a terrible balance, between having faith that we will be in the Kingdom because Christ died to save us, and on the other hand having the humility, the real humility, to know we shouldn’t be there. In fact, this is such an acute paradox that I would say it’s one of those irreconcilable paradoxes which God has designed, and built in to our spiritual experience. Real humility doesn’t come easy. It isn’t remarking ‘Of course, we’re all sinners’ in an offhand way.” Duncan Heaster, *Beyond Bible Basics*, page 808.

**Brother Heaster lists a number of parables of the accepted to illustrate his argument:-**

- The prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32)
- The last (weak) labourer (Matt. 20:1-16)
- The sick (Luke 14:5)
- One with a splinter in his eye (Matt. 7:3-5)
- The one in the most obscure seat (Luke 14:8-11)
- The Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37)
- The son who refused then changed his mind (Matt. 21:28-32)
- The king who surrenders (Luke 14:31-32)
- Those who thought their oil would run out (Matt. 25:1-10)

“The Biblical evidence is that those who will be in the Kingdom basically love God, but really feel they shouldn’t be in His Kingdom. There is much Biblical reason to believe that we should be positive about the fact we will surely be in the Kingdom.” Duncan Heaster, *Beyond Bible Basics*, page 815.

Brother Thomas also urges us to have confidence in God’s promises:-

“Surely they who are keeping the faith, and earnestly desiring ‘the appearing of the glory of the great God and Saviour Jesus Christ,’ may view the judgment of that day, now so close at hand, as cheerfully (as Paul). It is only evildoers that have reason to be afraid.

The only way, then, for the righteous to approach the dread tribunal in the spirit evinced by Paul in 2 Tim. 4:7-8, is to ‘walk in the steps of Abraham’s faith,’ and after the example of Jesus Christ. In this way we may attain to the degree of excellence which will give us ‘boldness in the day of judgment’ (1 John 4:17).” John Thomas, *Anastasis* (1947 Edition), pages 11 and 27.

## 1.9 Self-love

“Self-love” is not an easy concept for many of us understand or accept. It is referred to several times in the Bible:-

Lev. 19:18 – ‘you shall love your neighbour as yourself.’

This passage is quoted in Matt. 19:19; 22:39; Luke 10:27; Eph. 5:28, 33; James 2:8. Jesus prefaced this statement with the command to love God with all we have. We therefore have to love God, our neighbours and ourselves, in a consistent and effective manner.

“Regardless of who this person is (that we are to love) I am to love him or her in the same positive, caring manner I would treat myself.” J. Grant Howard, *‘Balancing Life’s Demands,’* page 44

Therefore we do have some value, even to ourselves! We are not to put ourselves down. Our lives, growth, relationships and responsibilities need to be catered for. My thoughts, feelings, decisions, body, attitudes, sexuality, words and reactions are significant. Whenever we pray, read the Bible, praise God and worship Him we are part of the activity. It is of inestimable value to us as well as to Him! We are always in some way both the contributor and the receiver. How do we ‘love ourselves’? By doing what is best for us. By giving ourselves what is best for us (not what our human nature craves, of course).

When we recall that God’s purpose is to have a marriage-relationship with us we can appreciate the importance of this is a two-way bond with our Creator.

“Self-love, as I understand the concept biblically and psychologically, includes the following:

- (1) accepting myself as a child of God who is lovable;
- (2) being willing to give up considering myself as the centre of the world;
- (3) recognizing my need of God’s forgiveness and redemption.” David E. Carlson, *‘Counseling and Self-esteem,’* page 12.

Cassette **Tape Recordings** of Bro. Stephen Hill's seminars held in SA on "Self-esteem: A Biblical Perspective" and "Grieving" are now available on loan from Bro. Rex Dupe on 9736-466