



“These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full” (John 15:11).

Self-Esteem

Central Truth: Abiding in Christ gives the believer a healthy view of himself.

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How do you picture yourself? What is your mental image of yourself? The answers to those questions indicate your level of self-esteem.

A person who is overly aware of himself has an unhealthy self-image. He becomes preoccupied with his problems. He is unwilling to expose his thoughts or attract attention to himself by joining freely in social functions. He feels rejected and withdraws, thus increasing his poor self-image.

A healthy self-image accepts the truth about oneself. It recognizes that each person is superior to others in some things and inferior to them in other things. The areas of superiority do not make him vain, nor do the areas of inferiority make him uncomfortable. He recognizes his true worth before God, being as important as any other person. Admitting his strengths and his weaknesses, he seeks to develop his full potential as one made in the “*image*” and “*likeness*” of God (Genesis 1:26, 27).

You may picture yourself in either of three ways. You may have a sub self-image, a super self-image, or a sane self-image. The first spurns God by feelings of inferiority. The second spurns God by feelings of self-sufficiency and pride. The third honors God by accepting His work in man and seeking to become all God has designed him to be.

I. THE PROBLEM OF SUB SELF-ESTEEM

Is a low estimate of oneself a sign of humility? Absolutely not! True humility is simply the opposite of pride and self-assertion. It honors God and

man without defacing either. Sub self-esteem dishonors both God and man. Feelings of inferiority are a major problem in our culture. The mass of literature on the inferiority complex and the emphasis on self-sufficiency indicate the extent of the problem.

A. Low self-esteem is easy to identify. One who suffers from it has a sense of inadequacy; he has a fear of failure. His sense of self-consciousness is so great that he withdraws from persons or projects which might show his supposed weakness. His emphasis is on his own weakness and on the other person's strength. It is a miserable state of mind.

B. Low self-esteem is seen in the Bible. Leah had some problem about her eyes (*"tender eyed"*) which put her in stark contrast to her sister Rachel, who was *"beautiful and well favoured"* (Genesis 29: 17). Moses had a speech impediment that made him feel unqualified to represent God before Pharaoh (Exodus 4:10-16). Jeremiah thought himself too young to be a prophet of God (Jeremiah 1:4-10). Timothy was young, also, and in danger of withdrawing from his assigned ministry (I Timothy 4:12, 14; II Timothy 1:5, 6). Amos had no professional training and thought himself incapable (Amos 7:12-16).

C. Low self-esteem is common today. The same reasons which hindered people then, hinder people now. There is still a problem of withdrawing because of youth (Jeremiah 1:6), lack of physical beauty (Genesis 29:17), previous failure and/or physical limitations (Exodus 3, 4), fear of people (Jeremiah 1:8, 17), and lack of professional training (Amos 7:12-16). Yet, God will enable a person today as He did in Bible times.

The devil has used an inferiority complex to keep many people in bondage. They live in misery because of a warped evaluation of themselves. They are commonly kept from God's service because of Satan's accusation against them. A low self-image is a spiritual, as well as a psychological, problem.

II. THE PROBLEM OF SUPER SELF-ESTEEM

A super self-esteem is one in which a person thinks of himself *"more highly than he ought to think"* (Romans 12:3). Such an attitude is often a cover up for a sense of inferiority. It is not based on true superiority. It is commonly just sinful pride.

A. The devil causes the spirit of super self-esteem. Called *"the pride of life"* in I John 2:16, it is *"not of the Father, but is of the world."* Satan is *"the god of this world"* (II Corinthians 4:4); he puts the spirit of wicked pride in people's hearts. There is no place for a spirit of proud superiority in

the heart of a Christian.

B. God hates the spirit of super self-esteem. Proverbs 6:16, 19 lists seven things that God hates so much that each is an abomination to Him. The first on the list is *“a proud look.”* He draws himself up to do battle with the proud person (James 4:6). He warns us against thinking too highly of ourselves and calls us to think soberly and sanely instead (Romans 12:3). The unregenerate world magnifies the man who acts superior, but God hates and resists such a spirit.

C. Thinking people detest the spirit of super self-esteem. A man of God *“respecteth not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies”* (Psalm 40:4). The proud scorn those who keep God's law, dig pits for them to fall into, and oppress the humble (Psalm 119:51, 85, 122). How could anyone respect such a vain person? It is a burden to be in company with those filled with scorn and contempt for others (Psalm 123:4). Some will follow the person who thinks himself superior because they want his favors. But thinking people turn from him, realizing that God's judgment waits.

D. The person of super self-esteem will suffer for it. Nebuchadnezzar suffered seven years of mental illness because of his pride (Daniel 4:29-37). Violence attends the way of the proud (Psalm 73:6). Contention follows his way (Proverbs 13:10). Destruction and a fall await him (Proverbs 16:18). He is deceived by his own heart (Obadiah 3). Lifted up by his pride, he falls into the condemnation of the devil (I Timothy 3:6).

Hear this solemn word from God: *“A man's pride shall bring him low: but honour shall uphold the humble in spirit”* (Proverbs 29:23). Be warned and be humble.

III. THE KEY TO SANE SELF-ESTEEM

Having considered the inferiority problem and the superiority problem, let us turn to John 15 to see what our attitude should be. Under a beautiful analogy of a vine and its branches representing Christ and Christians, we are shown the key to a sane self-esteem.

A. Remember your union with Christ. *“I am the vine, ye are the branches”* (John 15:5). That means that Jesus is to us all that the vine is to the branches. He provides life, support, nourishment, and the capacity to bear appropriate fruit. Think about that! The branch has no reason for existence, indeed no ability to exist, apart from the vine.

No less than 164 times in his thirteen New Testament epistles Paul refers to the Christian's being *“in Christ.”* That makes one of infinite worth and relieves all sense of inferiority without encouraging superiority. *“By the*

grace of God I am what I am” (I Corinthians 15:10).

B. Consider the work of the Father. Jesus said, *“My Father is the husbandman”* (John 15:1). God the Father cultivates the soil and cares for the vine. He is responsible for the stalk and the branches of the vine. He is responsible for Jesus and all His disciples. Rejoice in that truth.

No wonder God said through the pen of Paul, *“It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure”* (Philippians 2:13).

Who would have any attitude other than sane self-esteem when he realizes God himself is watching over him and working in him? It keeps one from inferiority because God is at work. It keeps one from superiority because he needs God's work. Evaluate yourself in the light of that biblical teaching.

C. Depend on your source of supply. *“As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine; no more can ye, except ye abide in me. . . . For without me ye can do nothing”* (John 15:4, 5). What happens to a branch which is cut off from the vine? It withers and dies. What happens to a branch which is securely grown to the vine? It thrives and produces leaves plus fruit. The difference is the source of supply.

God told Jeremiah that he had been chosen before birth to be a prophet. God would, therefore, commission him, encourage him, direct him, and give him words to speak with power (Jeremiah 1:4, 10). What a source of supply! You can trust God to minister to you as He ministered to Jeremiah.

D. Recognize your potential for fruitfulness. Jesus recognized three levels of fruit bearing. He called them *“fruit, . . . more fruit, . . . much fruit”* (John 15:2, 5). Remember that the fruit appears on the branch, not on the stalk of the vine. The promise is that God the Father (as the capable gardener) will work in you so that your fruit will increase more and more.

What is your potential in the work of God? However you may answer, the potential is far beyond what you think. It is not limited by your ability, but by God's enabling. That makes you of great value. Do not sin by limiting God with your sense of inability. *“God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work”* (II Corinthians 9:8).

E. Affirm your enabling from God. *“God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind”* (II Timothy 1:7). The *“fear”* mentioned is not a sense of danger, dread, or foreboding. Paul would have used the Greek word *phobos*. Instead, he used *deilia*, which means “timidity; fear; cowardice.” He does not make you miserable with a sense of inferiority. If He does not, who does?

God has given us a spirit of strength in the Lord, love of the Lord, and

self-discipline for the Lord. His love includes more than our salvation, though that is wonderfully included (I Timothy 1:15). *“Having loved his own which were in the world, he loved them unto the end”* (John 13:1). As He provided what we needed for salvation, He continues to provide what we need for service. Remember how the branch receives its support from the vine and keep on trusting Jesus.

F. Wait on God to judge you. Who determines our real worth? It is not determined by our estimate of ourselves. It is not determined by other people's estimate of us. It is determined by God's estimation. That is the great truth expressed in I Corinthians 4:3, 4, *“With me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. . . . He that judgeth me is the Lord.”* Do not let human judgment create a sense of inferiority or superiority in you. The real question is, *“What does God think of me?”*

Can one have a healthy self-image without being filled with pride? Oh, yes. Each person is of great value because he is made in the image of God. Each person is of great value because Christ died for him. The Christian is of great value because the Holy Spirit lives the life of God in him and the nature of God dwells in him as the dear child of His love.

Never measure your worth and value by what you accomplish. You are worthwhile because you are God's. Be encouraged and rejoice!

Questions

1. What is self-esteem?
2. What do we mean by a sub, super, and sane self-image?
3. What Bible characters do you know who had a low self-esteem?
4. How did God use them in spite of that attitude?
5. Why is a super self-esteem wrong?
6. Why is such a spirit rejected by God?
7. How does union with Christ promote a sane self-esteem?
8. How does the work of the Father promote a sane self-esteem?
9. What does II Timothy 1:7 say about your attitude toward yourself?
10. How can you show a healthy self-image this week?