

THE AUSTRALIAN ANABAPTIST
Supplement 5

Self Esteem
The False Gospel of Self-Esteem

*From a series of 3 messages by Merle Ruth
Given at the Dohner Mennonite Church, PA.,
In January, March and May 1990*

*And he said unto them,
Ye are they which justify yourselves before men;
But God knoweth your hearts:
For that which is highly esteemed among men
Is abomination in the sight of God.
Luke 16:15*

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Foreword

Brother Merle Ruth has been teaching from the Word of God for many years and his subjects have been wide ranging in areas that are not often spoken of or taught, if at all, in many churches professing Christianity.

They are always thought provoking and challenge us to examine our own life in light of God's Word.

Whilst this series of three messages was first presented in 1990 they are in a sense timeless because of man's innate nature to hold himself up and act contrary to Scripture, not just in this area of self-esteem, but in many others as well.

It is a weakness that, if we do not check it, Satan will exploit and in due course we will find ourselves under the condemnation of God either in this life or the next.

It is our prayer that in presenting these messages as one continuous message that you will be able to more fully comprehend the nature that is within us, whether it be that of Christ or that of the world.

The world promotes self-fulfilment and self-esteem, some may call it self glorification, but we who profess to be disciples of Jesus are called to be like Him, to learn of Him to be meek and lowly of heart and then we shall have rest unto our souls, and that is something self-esteem cannot provide.

JvL

Part 1 - The False Gospel of Self-Esteem.

Recently as I was reading in an old periodical that bears the name "Christianity Today" suddenly my attention was arrested by an advertisement that occupied perhaps half a page and I was so taken back by what it said that I clipped it out and brought it with me this morning. There in this advertisement in big bold letters it declares "Four Million Readers Can't Be Wrong!" Below that two books are pictured and then described as phenomenal bestsellers.

I have no way of knowing precisely how many copies of these books found their way into Mennonite homes but I have reasons for supposing that quite a few did. Neither do I know how many people were disarmed and rendered gullible by the sheer popularity of these books. After all there it is in black and white "Four Million Readers Can't Be Wrong!"

What are the implications of an assertion like that? Well it is as clear as day that the assumption underlying that assertion is that a statement is true or false depending on how widely it is believed.

Is that a biblical criteria? What is written in Romans 3: 4?

".....yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written,"

Now there is the Word from the Lord that envisions a hypothetical situation of enormous proportions in which there is a division of thought. On the one side stands the entire mass of humanity, on the other side stands God all alone, there is a disagreement, with a unanimous voice of all mankind that so and so is true but on the other side we hear the booming voice of God declaring that thus and thus is false.

Now the point of that passage is this; If something like that should ever materialize there should be no doubt whatever, there should be no question whatever that after God has spoken than the matter should be settled.

Now what does that do to this statement? Why it puts it in a very bad light. It exposes the fallacy of it all. This statement is 100% false; even if they could claim 4 billion readers it would still be false. And where does it appear? In a paper claiming to be both Evangelical and fundamental!

We live in a day where there are scores upon scores of misleading statements being promoted under the banner of gospel truth. Unless we are awake to that and well grounded in the Word of God we may be misled and deceived.

Well that is phase one of my introduction.

For phase number two I'm going to be reading from Ezekiel chapter 33.

Here the Prophet has recorded the commission he received from the Lord along with instructions for carrying out the commission plus warning of the consequences that will follow. I will confine my reading to verses six and seven.

Ezekiel 33:6-7

⁶ But if the watchman see the sword come, and blow not the trumpet, and the people be not warned; if the sword come, and take *any* person from among them, he is taken away in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at the watchman's hand. ⁷ So thou, O son of man, I have set thee a watchman unto the house of Israel; therefore thou shalt hear the word at my mouth, and warn them from me.

In principle the sword mentioned here could be any form of danger threatening Ezekiel's people, he was responsible to warn them and God is still demanding that from the leaders of His people today.

Jesus in his day continued to sound the trumpet of warning: Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, beware of the leaven of Sadducees, (*Matthew 16:6*) beware of the leaven of the Herodians. (*Mark 8:15*) Beware of any incorrect teachings lest you be deceived by it. The writers of the New Testament were moved of God to keep alive that same concern: Believe not every spirit but first try them, test them.

God put on the heart of Paul so great a burden for purity of doctrine that he addressed those gullible Galatians with possibly the hottest words in all his writings. He tells them though an angel from heaven preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed.

Today these gospels are being preached. There is the success gospel, the health and wealth gospel and now the self esteem gospel.

My message this morning will focus on this last named teaching which I am calling the False Gospel of Self-esteem. The word Gospel as you know means what? Someone tell me, Yes, Good News. Now the promoters of this teaching appear to believe that they now possess newly discovered good news that was never before recognised.

I may as well tell you right now that this particular message will not revolve around the true gospel but rather around this supposedly long neglected gospel.

Because of its nature the message will include a more than usual number of quotes and borrowings from a number of informative sources other than the Bible and whether wisely or not in order that you might better know what I am talking about I will be repeating names more than I ordinarily do. My purpose will be to acquaint us with and help us recognize this relatively new and highly attractive teaching. Now when I say highly attractive I mean highly attractive to the natural man.

I don't mean to imply that you yourself could not recognize the erroneous nature of this teaching, many of you could, knowing the true is still the best way to perceive the false. But as a watchman I still have the responsibility to warn because I see this movement is a great threat and one reason for it being that is the subtle way in which falsehood is mixed in with truth.

For a rough evaluation of this movement one ought to have some knowledge of its origin. So I want to take you now to the seed bed from which it came. That seed bed instead of being biblical is secular humanistic psychology. For the last 40 or more years the most popular theme in psychology has been that of self fulfillment. This concept has so thoroughly infiltrated society that the struggle for self fulfillment has become the leading edge of a cultural revolution.

One highly regarded analyzer of social trends claims that to one degree or another that about 80% of Americans are now committed to the search

for self fulfillment at the expense of the older self-denying ethic of earlier years.

Now with that kind of climate in the field of psychology there soon emerged a new department of study called Self Image Psychology. One supposedly important individual who evidently is very fascinated with these concepts claims that this has been the most important discovery of the century, bear in mind that it is his opinion.

I'm going to read now a paragraph that summarizes these developments.

“As society moved from self-denial to self-fulfillment a new vocabulary emerged which revealed a new inner attitude and a different view of life. The new vocabulary became the very fabric of a new psychology. This new psychological force is known as Humanistic psychology. Humanistic psychology’s greatest emphasis is on self. Self actualization is its major focus and self fulfillment is clarion call and self fulfillment with all its accompanying self opiniated and self fixated such as: self-love, self acceptance, self-esteem and self-worth has become the new promised land. Then as the church became psychologised the emphasis shifted from God to self.”

Well that paragraph moved us from the level of its origin where the thinking that surrounds this gospel of self-esteem made its entry into religious circles. Now a little bit more about that development.

Bruce Narramore, a leading evangelical psychologist who vigorously promotes self-worth teaching explains that development in this brief quote: “Under the influence of humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow many of us Christians have begun to see our need of self-love and self esteem.”

Now here is a frank admission that the self-love, self-worth movement did not grow out of any such thing as a more intense study of the Bible. No. It originated in the camp of humanistic psychologists and was brought into religious circles from the outside by supposedly Christian psychologists. These supposedly Christian psychologists claim that the fact that they borrowed from non-Christian humanistic thinkers should be no cause

for alarm. Operating under the slogan that all truth is God's truth they say that we must accept all truth regardless of the source from which it comes but many more cautious Christians are not convinced that what they borrowed really is true. And they have a point.

The final stage of the development that I have just traced is further described in the following paragraph. "The last 15 years has seen the rise of a powerful and influential movement within the church, meaning the professing organizational church, easily identified by labels such as self image, self-esteem, self-worth and self-love." This movement has one common denominator namely the emphasis of self. Regardless of religious persuasion everyone seems to be fighting what they perceive a shared enemy namely low self-esteem.

And consequently the last number of years the book market has been flooded with books that carry this new gospel of self-esteem. Books with titles such as these, "The Art of Learning to Love Yourself" "You Are Somebody Special" and "You're Better Than You Think"

I have discovered that this idea of feeling good about yourself will appear in literature at places where you would not expect to find it, I have discovered that. The self esteem gospel has all the appearance of being more than a mere passing fad, it has found acceptance in both Christian and non-Christian circles. It has so pervaded society that it is no longer perceived as anything but the most familiar and most acceptable way of thinking. It has been observed that it is one of the few ideologically-based movements in which one may find both friend and foe alike, an indication of how wide has been the acceptance of this concept.

Now let's move in a bit closer and get some glimpses of its ways and its claims.

Back in 1984 at a Christian day school in Grand Rapids Michigan 500 fourth and fifth grade pupils were given a week's training in how to recognize their true worth. They wrote essays on why they liked themselves or didn't, they acted out a skit called: "A Pat On the Back" and they were told to feel good about themselves. Bear in mind that that was a Christian day school.

The State of California has been weighing up the possibility of setting up a commission to study self-esteem with a view to reducing crime through raising the self image of otherwise potential criminal types. Proponents of this movement are demanding changes in the preaching and the worship of their churches, they are critical of the sentiments that they find in certain hymns: "Alas And Did My Saviour Bleed" is criticized because the writer refers to himself as: "Such a worm as I." Amazing Grace is criticized because of the clause: "That saved a wretch like me" and even "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" is criticized they don't like that clause; "And pour contempt on all my pride" they don't like that.

Now what are the claims of those who represent this movement?

According to this new gospel in our efforts to reach the lost we must avoid anything that threatens to destroy the sinners' fragile self esteem. We must avoid destroying that. Pride is no longer viewed in a bad light that it once was. After all they say the besetting sin of the human race is not pride but humility. At least they infer that. Man's major problem is now said to be lack of self esteem. Nearly every kind of personal problem not only personal problem but every kind problem out in society is blamed on a poor self image.

The first and great command and has been virtually rewritten to be: Thou shalt love thyself. So supposedly the mission of the church must now be revamped and geared to building up people's self image, that is our great task, they would say.

I have still more to share along the line of their claims.

Some of you may be familiar with the name Tim LaHaye, possibly one of the first of these books to find their way into Mennonite homes was the one entitled: "The Battle For The Mind" There are things in that book that I believe are non-biblical but in that book he did rightfully and in a masterful way expose the evils of humanism. More recently I received as a gift another of his books entitled: "How to Win Over Depression" One entire chapter of that book is devoted to depression and your self image and frankly I was disappointed. It is obvious that he has borrowed heavily from a system that he condemned in another of his books. Instead of accepting

the concepts of that movement hook line and sinker he takes what I would call a modified stance.

Here are two of his statements: "Every depressed person I have ever counseled has had a problem with self acceptance."

That really is not too profound a statement in view of the fact that almost every human being holds an inadequate image of himself.

That in my opinion does not quite have the right ring, it appears to me as though that Tim LaHaye is typical of those men who believe it is possible to work together humanistic psychology and biblical theology and so they attempt to baptize and Christianize the concepts of self image psychology.

James Dobson is another very popular figure in so-called evangelical circles, listen now to his claim:

"If I could write a prescription for the women of the world I would provide each one of them with a healthy dose of self-esteem and personal worth. I have no doubt that this is their greatest need."

Now I am willing to admit that James Dobson may know more about women than I do but of this I am sure even he does not know as much about their needs as God does and I have, like you, God's book in my possession.

A less known writer wrote a book entitled: "You Can Learn to Like Yourself" In that book he makes this claim: "You have to think that you are somebody if you want to maintain good mental health."

Well after reading that I thought of one man's analysis of the life of Moses. Moses lived to be how old? A hundred and twenty. And strangely, possibly providentially, his life divides into three equal parts. How did he spend the first 40 years of his life? In modern parlance we would say that he spent the first 40 years of his life learning to be somebody. His self image very likely was at its peak at the age of 40, right?

How did he spend the next 40 years? Well in striking contrast. During that time one could almost say that he learnt to be a nobody. Out there in the desert all alone.

What then did he learn during the last stage? It would not be far from the mark to say that then in leading the people out of Egypt Moses learnt that God is everything. Somehow that does not mesh very well with what you have been listening to does it? It doesn't mesh very well.

All this concern about building a better self image is making itself felt not only in religious circles but also in business circles. Today's success motivators have latched on to this new concept to help increase the volume of sales. Zig Ziegler, who is well thought of by at least one brother that I know, has offered this counsel: "To build your self image make a list of your positive qualities on a card and keep it for handy reference. Brag on yourself from time to time."

Well I don't think that needs any further comment.

Last evening while I was preparing this message my wife called to my attention a publicity item that we had received in the mail just yesterday. It is a notice from the chaplain of Good Samaritan Hospital:

"Dear fellow clergy,

This is an announcement of our third annual: "Up With Youth" program. "Up With Youth" is a day-long program which challenges our youth to think well of themselves and be better able to say No to drugs. It continues to be successful and we are eager to repeat it."

And they also recommend that it can be used by clergy and youth leaders in their congregational programs. There is also a second sheet and registration form "Up With Youth" Helping young people to develop self-esteem and say No to drugs.

Well, what shall we say to that? Is there anything wrong with helping young people to say No to drugs? No there is nothing wrong with that, that is a worthy cause but what about the methodology being employed in that program? Is it the gospel method or is it the method of self image psychology? The answer is obvious. They are going to be telling those young people it is beneath your dignity to get involved with drugs. And there is a big measure of truth in that but that alone will not succeed unless other God provided dynamics are brought to bear upon those young people, especially in the dynamic of the gospel.

One could also raise this question: What will this approach do to the pride that is already present in every human heart? What will it do to that?

Well that was a little detour; let's return now from our detour, we are listening to the claims of the promoters of the self esteem gospel.

I have reserved the most sweeping of all claims until last.

The man who is possibly the most influential promoter of this concept, Robert Schuler, went on record as saying: "Self esteem is the single greatest need facing the human race today" And again he asserts that: "Once a person believes that he is an unworthy sinner it is doubtful if he can accept the saving grace that God offers in Christ."

Perhaps you are wondering: Did I hear correctly? You probably did. Once a person believes he is an unworthy sinner it is doubtful if he can accept the saving grace that God offers in Christ.

Well there you have the false gospel mixed in with the true gospel. And whether it would be more correct to call it an attempt, an attempt to mix the two together. The two cannot really be mixed together, they are so opposite that you must choose one or the other, they will not work together. And it is highly probable that millions of Americans have been influenced by this last named man for he is one of the very popular TV evangelists and writers.

You have now been exposed to a cross-section of the self-esteem gospel.

I haven't said yet much about or very much in the way of evaluation. I would like it if you yourself would be doing that on your own and to assist you in that evaluation I'm going to share now some findings that have been accumulated by men who are alarmed over what has been happening.

Here is a paragraph that I am simply going to read verbatim.

"A research project at Purdue university compared 2 groups of individuals one with low esteem and the other with high self-esteem. They were compared in regard to solving problems. The result of the study once more explodes the myth that high self-esteem is a must for mankind."

The results of the study were reported by one of the two researchers assigned to the project he says and I quote: "Self-esteem is generally consid-

ered an across-the-board important attitude but this study showed self-esteem to correlate negatively with performance."

He concludes by stating that in that particular study the higher the self-esteem the poorer the performance. Do you get that? The higher the self-esteem the poorer the performance in solving problems.

In another survey high school students were asked to rate themselves against others in various areas of ability, here are some of the results of that survey: In leadership ability 70% of those high school students rated themselves above average. In athletic ability 60% viewed themselves as a better than average. In ability to get along with others they all rated themselves above average.

In another survey 94% of college faculty members indicated that they considered themselves better than the average colleague.

So even the research does not support the claims made by these men. This comes as no surprise to the Bible reading Christians. The Bible reading Christians could have predicted that outcome, they could have predicted that it would be that way.

How thankful we ought to be for the protection that God has supplied against a deception. We have it here in His word and it is illuminated by His Spirit.

One of these researchers wrote a book entitled "The Inflated Self" in which he draws this conclusion: "Preachers who deliver ego boosting pep talks to audiences who are supposedly plagued with miserable self images are preaching to problems that seldom exist."

Very well put, very well put.

The crux of the matter is this: Blaming problems of low self-esteem makes repentance unnecessary. That is why this teaching has become so popular, it offers a detour around repentance, and it is easier on one's pride. If you want your problems to swell get preoccupied with yourself still more. If you want your problems to shrink get pre-occupied with the Lord Jesus Christ.

The heart cry of God is: Look unto me and be saved all the ends of the earth. (*Isaiah 45:22*) Look away from yourself, look to Me. It was Isaiah's new glimpse of the glory God recorded in chapter 6 that gave him a new awareness of his own unworthiness, that vision drained away his self-esteem but it left him a better man. (*Isaiah 6:1-7*)

An accurate self image can be found in only one place -real close to God. That is the only place where you will find an accurate self image.

Let's get there and let's stay there.

Part 2: Self-Esteem Under the Microscope of God's Word.

Let me be the first to extend a Christian greeting of love to each of the numerous visitors present with us this morning.

As an introduction this morning I'm going to offer you the opportunity to conduct an evaluation test. I would like you to weigh these three statements:

Statement Number one: If we are supposed to love our neighbour as ourselves then we first need to learn to love ourselves.

Statement Number two: Everyone needs to develop a sense of self-worth because God made us unique creatures in which He takes special pride.

Statement Number three: The human being is a glorious dignified creature with infinite value.

Taken together how do you rate those statements? Are they 100% true? Are they 100% false? Or are they a mixture of truth and falsehood?

I am not going to require a verbal response but it would be interesting to know what you are thinking. I selected those statements because they are typical of a new thrust that has appeared in the religious world of our day, not just the religious world but the Christian circle, professing Christendom and it is already knocking at our doors.

Two of those statements are Mennonite written statements appearing in a Mennonite produced publication. This past week in one of the Lebanon (County Pennsylvania) churches nationally acclaimed authors conducted a workshop on self esteem. Now I can well imagine that some of you are thinking: Well really is there anything actually wrong with those statements? I admit that there was a time too when I may have responded in that way.

You have probably guessed by now but you will be listening this morning to the continuation of a former message. That former message was enti-

tled The False Gospel of Self Esteem. Today's message is entitled: The Self-esteem Gospel Under the Microscope of God's Word.

If your memory serves you well you'll remember that this movement originated with concepts that were formulated by humanistic psychiatrists holding a humanistic view of man, these theories were then adopted by certain influential supposedly Christian counselors and writers, gradually they found their way into the evangelical circles. Today this package of theories is hailed by many as long neglected, newly discovered, highly important biblical truth.

This new orientation shifts attention from God to man to self. It moves in a world that revolves around self rather than God. Personal problems of whatever kind that they may be are commonly blamed on factors such as the following: A lack of parental love in childhood, a consequent inability to relate properly, a poor self-image, a failure to recognize one's self-worth and a deep-seated self-hatred. These are some of the factors that are at the root of our personal problems today -supposedly.

Underlying this whole movement is the assumption that a person is born good, it is society that spoils him. If one has a problem it is because one didn't treat him the way he deserves to be treated. Instead of being a sinner this movement views man as a victim, a victim of circumstances, unfavorable circumstances.

Before proceeding further may I insert this observation: Almost every erroneous system that has ever arisen had in it elements of truth and this one is no exception. It does say things that need to be said. It is likewise true that, even without introducing any elements of falsehood, to simply foster a lopsided emphasis will lead to undesirable consequences. This movement does both, it fosters a lopsided emphasis and it also introduces elements of falsehood.

We don't deny that children need love and that parental harshness is detrimental, parents should never ridicule their children and to repeatedly tell a youngster that he will never amount to anything is a cruel mistake. On the other hand many have survived that kind of treatment and have gone on

to become noble men and women of God. Thanks to God we all have a natural built-in capacity to recover from treatment that is less than ideal because God knew that many of us would grow up under less than ideal circumstances, and when one becomes a Christian additional resources become available for recovery from such treatment.

According to the gospel of self-esteem that church's mission is not to help people see their sinfulness but rather to help them see how valuable they are. And this calls for an altogether different approach and its popularity is understandable because it allows for a detour around repentance. Sin instead of being blotted out it is allowed to thrive and instead of correcting problems that compounds the problem.

Fortunately not everyone is buying this line. Near the conclusion of the last message I reported the results of two or three surveys, those results disprove the widespread claim that virtually everyone is suffering from a bad self-image. According to those surveys most people already have a high opinion of themselves.

The Bible reader doesn't need a survey to tell him that, he has already learned that from the most authoritative source available. The Bible is the most or should say the best sourcebook available for the study of human nature. To fail to take into consideration God's word is to leave out the most authoritative source on human nature. Not only is the Bible that but the Bible is also the best microscope for examining the claims of any system that is alleged to be biblical. And as I have already implied this new movement, this new teaching, the self-esteem gospel does claim to be biblical. That being the case I invite you now to examine with me the grounds for those claims.

One of the main theories on which they build could be stated in these terms and I quote: "Until a person is properly treated in love he will be unable to properly love God and his neighbour. Before we can perform our higher duties our basic needs such as the need for security and acceptance must be met."

That is one of their claims and it has far reaching implications, if what they say is true, then the Christian who was deprived of his supposed self

esteem needs must not be held responsible for his spiritual failures until his self image is raised to a satisfactory level. Only then supposedly will he be capable of loving God and others as he should, but nowhere, no where does the Bible support this idea. In fact Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount shows that this concept puts priorities in reverse.

In *Matthew six* Jesus teaches that the so-called basic needs that the Gentiles seek after should not be our prime concern, we are first to seek the Kingdom of God and His righteousness. The self-esteem Gospel says: I must have my lower needs satisfied first if you expect me to seek higher ends. Jesus says: No, My disciple must put Me and my other disciples first and his own, all other matters secondary, and that includes whether or not my parents treated me wisely, whether or not others have shown me the respect they should have. Treatment that is less than ideal in any of those areas does not exempt one from the obligation he owes to God and his fellow men.

In the New Testament epistles the writers insist that their readers love God and their fellow men in spite of any deficiencies that they may have experienced in their background, and remember many of their readers were as it were raw converts who did not grow up in exemplary homes and communities. They had experienced many deficiencies, many mistreatments.

Here is another question: If improper treatment from others can so easily inflict on us such lasting damage and render us so spiritually impotent why have not persecuted saints like the Apostle Paul, suffered from a crippling self image? Why did they not suffer from that as people today who receive that kind of treatment supposedly are suffering?

There must be something wrong with the basic self love theory when it fits so poorly in so many instances.

We are going to move now to the principal Bible passages appealed to by those who try to give validity to this important teaching.

I will be reading first from Matthew 22. In this chapter question after question is being fired at our Lord by His opponents, the one that we are interested in begins with verse 35.

Matthew 22:35-40

“Then one of them, *which was a lawyer*, asked *him a question*, tempting him, and saying, ³⁶ Master, *which is the great commandment in the law?* ³⁷ Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. ³⁸ This is the first and great commandment. ³⁹ And the second *is* like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. ⁴⁰ On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Now I have learned that those promoters of self-esteem who lay claim to being Christian quote verse 39 more frequently than any other Bible verse. One of them claims that here is a command to love yourself and he goes on to explain that we cannot love our neighbour as ourselves until we first learn to love ourselves because the standard by which we determine how to love our neighbour is how we love ourselves.

Now if you suspect that is reading more into that verse than what is there you are right. Neither here nor anywhere are we commanded to love ourselves. In focus here are only two commandments: Love God, Love your neighbour. Yet the self-esteem people claim to find a third commandment: Love yourself. And on top of that they make the additional mistake of making the first two commandments depend on the supposed third commandment. Notice that in this quote from one of their leaders: "Actually our ability to love God and to love our neighbour is limited by our ability to love ourselves. We cannot love God more than we love our neighbour and we cannot love our neighbour more than we love ourselves."

Again the question we must ask is: Can the passage be made to yield all that they claim to find in it without doing violence to it? Along with many others we answer: No!

What is Jesus really doing in verse 39? Isn't He presupposing the fact that there is already in existence universally a built-in love for one's self? Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

Instead of giving a third commandment Jesus is here declaring that the second of the great commandments is to love your neighbour as you already love yourself. In the first part of verse 39 Jesus indicates that this second commandment is like unto the first. What does He mean? How are they meant to be alike? In this respect: Just as we are to love God wholeheartedly as is stated in verse 37, so we are to love our neighbour that way too, wholeheartedly and that will likewise be naturally the way we love ourselves.

This same built-in self-love that is here presupposed by Jesus is also presupposed by Paul in *Ephesians 5* where husbands are commanded to love their wives as their own bodies and then by divine inspiration the Apostle Paul affirms that no man yet ever hated his own flesh but nourisheth it and cherisheth it as Christ does the Church. And yet in spite of these clearly asserted facts some would try to persuade us to believe that there are just an awful lot of people all around us who have such a terribly low view of themselves that they actually take such a view of themselves so that their initial need supposedly is to learn to love themselves.

Are we to suppose that they are right and the Bible wrong?

That these people don't really hate themselves can be fairly easily demonstrated even logically. Take for example the person who says: "I am so ugly I hate myself."

If he actually hated himself would he be upset over his ugliness if he actually hated himself? No, it is because he loves himself that he is upset over his appearance and the way others respond to him.

Again the depressed person who says that he hates himself because of having wasted his life would he grieve over having wasted his life if he really hated himself? No, it is because he loves himself that he is unhappy about having wasted his life.

How about the person who is always putting himself down? Does he really suffer from low self-image? No, he is simply letting other people know that his performance is not up to the standard that he has set for himself. Instead of suffering from low self-esteem he is suffering from wounded pride. I am not living up to my standard, I thought I was impor-

tant, I thought I could do it just the right way, but I have discovered that I can't. That is wounded pride. That is not suffering from a low self-image.

One saint explained it this way: "Boasting is an evidence that we are pleased with ourselves, belittling is an indication that we are disappointed with ourselves: either way we reveal that we have a high opinion of ourselves."

But this kind of human logic does not provide an adequate foundation on which to arrive at conclusions. A more important consideration is: Can this or that view be substantiated from the Bible? We have already noted that one of their favorite passages does not really provide the support that they claim for it.

Now we want to discover how their claim appears in the light of other Bible passages that touch on this subject of self-esteem or self-image.

So for a start let's turn to first Samuel 15:17.

Samuel is here addressing King Saul after his failure to carry out the word of the Lord. He is about to announce to Saul that consequently God has rejected him, but the verse I'm about to read verse 17 makes mention of a better chapter in Saul's life.

1 Samuel 15:17

"And Samuel said, When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the Lord anointed thee king over Israel?"

The implication is that Saul is no longer little in his own eyes; something happened to that once healthy self-image, it has become inflated with pride.

I'm turning now to Proverbs 21:2. This verse begins with a sweeping generalization:

Proverbs 21:2

"Every way of a man is right in his own eyes: but the Lord pondereth the hearts."

Would anyone conclude on the basis of this verse that the human family is suffering from a lack of self-esteem? Hardly. Every way of a man is right in his own eyes.

Coming now into the New Testament and every way of a man is right in his own eyes.

Luke 18:11-12

“The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men *are*, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. ¹² I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.”

Even though he was religious this man obviously had an inflated self-image.

One more Mark 14 and I will be reading a portion of verse 27 and then verse 29.

Mark 14:27, 29

“And Jesus saith unto them, All ye shall be offended because of me this night:²⁹ But Peter said unto him, Although all shall be offended, yet *will* not I.”

Here is a follower of Christ manifesting that same attitude. However I'm glad for the change that he soon experienced by the grace of God.

Well what have we learned from this little survey? We have learnt that the uniform witness of the Bible is that man is universally inclined to form an exaggerated opinion of himself. And so I agree with the writer who states that: "The current elevation of self-love of self-esteem is like pouring gasoline on a fire that is already raging out of control."

So then we must conclude that the claim they make bearing on this point is not valid, under the microscope of God it does not appear to be correct.

What about their other claims? One of them relates to man's worth.

So let's take that and put that under the microscope. If you were to examine their writings you would discover that passages like *Romans 6* and *Colossians 3* are used to make professing Christians feel good about themselves. Those are the passages that speak of the great changes that accompany regeneration, the past is forgiven, the old life is left behind, we are

made alive unto God and according to their claims this gives Christians the ground for viewing themselves as uniquely wonderful intrinsically valuable.

But we need to ask why were those chapters written? What is the underlying purpose behind the writing of those chapters? Were they written to give the Christian a pat on the back?

No. They were written to get us to live differently than in our past, more saintly, more self-denyingly. These passages show us our position in Christ for the purpose of challenging us to be in fact what we are counted to be in Christ, for unless we are, unless we move in that direction we may lose our position in Christ. Since you are spiritually risen with Christ seek those things which are above, mortify sinful bodily tendencies, keep the old man crucified, don't let sin reign in your mortal body and on the positive side yield your all unto God. This is the emphasis found in Romans 6 and Colossians 3. These challenges are meant to destroy any smug self-satisfaction that may yet exist and to motivate the saint to press on the upward way.

Actually nothing could be better designed than this to deliver one from preoccupation with self and with one's own worth.

Again what they claim to find in those passages others cannot find.

Self-esteem preachers also appeal to Bible passages that speak of man being made in God's image. They view this as positive evidence that man possesses infinite worth. But I ask you does the former fact necessarily prove the latter. Does the fact that we are made in the image of God necessarily prove that we are of infinite value?

Husbands if you were to show someone a photograph of your wife and they would make fun of it and tear it up I don't doubt that you would be disturbed. But why? After all that photo is just a piece of paper of little relative value, however the thing that would concern you would not be the loss of the photo but the indignity shown to the one that it represents.

It is true there are passages that warn us against mistreating our fellow man because he bears the image of God, he is a photo of God. To dishonor

a man is to dishonor God. That is what makes the offence so serious, it is the One whose image man bears that deserves to be literally worshipped not the man who bears the image, he is just a photograph, valuable, Yes. But does that give him infinite worth? I very much doubt that it does. In my opinion it is possible to honour the sanctity of life without claiming that it possesses infinite worth, human life I am talking about.

I'm turning now to Luke 12 verse six. Here is another passage that is sometimes appealed to by self-worth teachers.

Luke 12:6-7 “Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? ⁷ But even the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not therefore: ye are of more value than many sparrows.”

Some have claimed: Here you have it! This teaches the great value of man, his infinite worth! But does it? It does indeed declare that man is of more value than many sparrows but it also puts the price of a 1000 sparrows at little more than five dollars in our currency. To say then that man is worth more than many sparrows is not real flattering after all, but that is not the point of this passage. The main teaching in this passage is not the value of man but God's far reaching providence. In fact His care, God's care extends to the sparrows which are worth so little that it surely extends to man who is worth more. But again this issues to no-one a license to make the fantastic claims that are being made today.

Lastly we are going to devote a few minutes to how this teaching can create distorted views of salvation. Turning now to Deuteronomy chapter 7 because this gives us a truth that is very foundational. Evidently God saw in Israel a tendency to have too high a group image. In this chapter Deuteronomy 7 beginning with verse seven where God corrects that misconception:

Deuteronomy 7:7-8

“The Lord did not set his love upon you, nor choose you, because ye were more in number than any people; for ye were the fewest of all people: [8] But because the Lord loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the Lord brought you out with

a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.”

Now here is a truth that is also applicable on the salvation level and it dare not be lost sight of. The self-worth teachers harp on how valuable man is to God as though that were the reason for God reaching down to save man, we were too valuable to lose they say, that is why Christ came and died.

Here is one of their statements: "Many Christians' self-esteem is terribly low, they somehow have not come to the place of seeing how precious they are to God. They even wonder how God could have loved a person such as themselves. And they are amazed that God forgave their sins in the first place."

That statement communicates a false impression that is calculated to leave me with the impression that I had a right to expect God to save me for supposedly I was somewhat worthy. The truth is I should be amazed that God's grace reached down to save a worm like me. I should be amazed and so should you.

Read *Romans 5* and that will tell you what you were prior to your conversion, a weak, sick, sinful enemy of God. We were there and we remain so unworthy that we have no claim whatsoever on even the mercy of God. David was right when he said: "I am not worthy of the least of thy mercies."

God did for me what He did, not because I was worth so much but because He loved me so much in spite of my unworthiness. You see the difference?

The teaching that God redeemed man because of his great worth is erroneous. Don't accept it. The Bible is the touch stone of truth.

This study has opened my eyes to a mistake that well meaning persons who had no connection with this movement can nevertheless make and I

plead guilty to having made it myself. I conclude that it is possible to overstate and over emphasize that worth of man.

Sometimes we will hear a statement and it strikes us as being very impressive and without weighing it we'll we run away with accepting it as gospel truth. Take for example this statement: "Man was worth the death of deity."

I myself may have said that in the past. Maybe I am wrong but today I would be slow to say that. Tell me after the service if you think I'm wrong.

In preference to that statement I prefer this one: "God does not love us because we are valuable, we are valuable because God loves us."

I like that distinction, I believe that is biblical.

The self esteem gospel magnifies man because it is borrowed from humanism which aims to deify man. In contrast of the true gospel magnifies God, the grace of God, the mercy of God.

The Lord willing I hope to present the biblical alternative to the self-worth approach. I solicit your prayers for that undertaking.

Self-Esteem - Part 3

A Biblical Response to the Self-Esteem Thrust

I began this series that was designed to alert us to a new movement that has been sweeping the land namely the false Gospel of Self-Esteem.

In the first message we noted the non-biblical origin of this movement and how it found its way into church circles. The promoters of this movement claimed to have found a great and valuable discovery. According to their analysis lack of self-esteem lies at the root of nearly all human problems. Until one feels real good about himself he cannot be expected to perform well ought to live up to God's standard.

Underlying this movement is the assumption that all men are good by nature and of infinite value but somewhere along the road of life many people become victims. Other people, very often parents or marital companions robbed them of their sense of self-worth and leave them with a poor self image. So much of this has been done that America is supposedly suffering from an inferiority epidemic.

The mission of the Church according to this new Gospel is to help people build up their broken down self-esteem. Instead of focusing on the sinfulness of man this new movement puts a premium on self-worth and although it virtually ignores repentance it claims to be Biblical.

In the second message we noted the difficulty that one encounters when he tries reconcile this new teaching with the Bible. They would like us to believe feelings of guilt and unworthiness are beneath the dignity of man and militate against a person's well-being, but in the Bible a broken spirit and a contrite heart (*Psalm 51:17*) is put in a favorable light. They would like us to believe to that we have nothing to fear from pride but the Bible from cover to cover views pride as a very widespread, deep-seated, self-destructive God defying sin. In an effort to baptize their theories the proponents of self-esteem claim to have found a numerous Bible passages that substantiate their claims, supposedly. They claim that there are just an awful lot of people who cannot accept themselves and consequently they struggle with self rejection and even self-hatred.

These people they say need to be taught to love themselves, they don't love themselves they need to be taught to do so, however the Bible plainly declares no man ever yet hated his own flesh (*Ephesians 5:29*) and simple logic would indicate that if people didn't already love themselves they wouldn't care whether or not they feel good about themselves. It is this universal built-in self-love that Jesus presupposed when He said thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. (*Mark 12:31*) They however read into that an actual command to love yourself.

Passages that speak of the believers' position in Christ are employed to build self-esteem in spite of the fact that in those passages the ongoing crucifixion of self is insisted upon as a means of remaining in Christ. They go to great lengths to play up the worth of the individual; within limits that is healthy because there are segments of our society that view man as just another worthless animal can so we can appreciate that emphasis. On the other hand to insist as some of them do, that God saved us because of our great worth that is introducing a note that is foreign to the tenor of the Bible.

The Bible leads us to believe that God did for us what He did not because we were worth so much but because He loves us so much. He, the God of infinite love, loves the unlovely. David had little to gain by bringing crippled Mephibosheth into his court. Nevertheless out of kindness and for the sake of Jonathan he did that. We are like Mephibosheth, we have been crippled, we are lame but the great kindness of God has spared us. (*2Samuel 4:4, 2 Samuel 9:10-13*)

For this third concluding message I have entitled the message A Biblical Response to the Self-esteem Thrust.

To begin with from the biblical perspective their view of man is too one-sided. They seem almost oblivious of the fact that man is no longer in the state in which he was originally created. Some of them very definitely deny that a Fall ever did occur. The man God made did indeed resemble a king but sin has reduced him to a king in ruins. It is true enough that man was created in the image of God but today that image has been badly defaced.

In *Genesis 5:3* you can read how that Adam begat a son after his image. And so although the man was created in the image of God he now is born in the image of Adam and has a nature that is inclined towards sin. I doubt very much if other people by putting me down in one way or another can really rob me of my God endowed dignity but I myself can do it by the choices I make, by living after the flesh, by catering to my depraved nature I myself can rob myself of that God endowed dignity. And by pursuing that course I can descend to a level lower than the animal level.

In the opening verses of first Corinthians 13 God through His servant Paul gives this evaluation of the person is devoid of love. You know the passage:

1 Corinthians 13:1-2

"Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. [2] And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity," And what is the rest? "I am nothing."

I'm guessing that there are a lot of people who wish that facts like we have been looking at and passages like that did not exist because they do not fit in with their theories but as long we ignore God revealed truth we cannot arrive at an accurate appraisal of ourselves. The truest thing about you is what the Bible says about you.

And so then in general terms how should a man appraise himself?

This is my answer. The man with a proper self image will see himself as having both dignity and depravity. The self-worth teachers emphasize only the one side.

Secondly from the biblical perspective a well supervised childhood and youth is a great advantage in forming a healthy self image, this fact we must freely admit, but to suggest that the forming of a healthy self image is possible only for people with this benefit that is placing a limit on the grace of God.

Self image problems that stem from a less than ideal childhood are never that deep that they are beyond the correcting grace of God. When we grow

up and come to Christ all the sinful patterns we developed can be replaced by wholesome ones. In *Ezekiel 18* it is made very clear that having an ungodly parent is not an insurmountable obstacle if the next generation is minded to choose rightly.

Thirdly from a biblical perspective we are not innocent helpless victims as some would have us to believe but rather we are free responsible agents accountable to God. Now obviously we are not responsible for everything that happens to us but we are responsible for what we do for what happens to us. We choose to make out of it either a stumbling block or a stepping stone. Joseph was put down repeatedly by his brothers and finally sold into Egypt but because of his close walk with God he was able to respond to that mistreatment in a way that disarmed it of all the harm that it might have done to his self-image. (*Genesis 37:23-28*)

I am of the opinion that if I lack a proper sense of self-worth and self-respect I have myself to blame more than anyone else, it is an indication that I have not been true to the ideals I have espoused. I seriously question whether it is possible for one person to give another person a sense of self-worth or self-respect, that person must earn it for himself by responsible upright living.

The way people are ignoring God's laws today it is no wonder they are troubled with a poor self-image and lack of self-worth.

Fourthly. And this I have in the form of a question: From the biblical perspective how should we view this business of feeling good about ourselves?

That could probably generate quite a discussion. Well I concluded that it depends on whether you are talking about the feelings of the old man or whether you are talking about the feelings of the new man in Christ. Is there anything in my unregenerate self that I ought to feel good about? Is there? We'll let the inspired Apostle Paul answer that he said: "For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth no good thing." (*Romans 7:18*) I have nothing, there is nothing in my under regenerative self that I ought to feel good about.

When does that old carnal nature feel good? It feels good when it feels superior, when it is able to look down on others, that's when that old carnal nature feels good but that is clearly a God forbidden feeling.

In contrast the new man in Christ feels good when he has the assurance that he is living within the will of God. And in my opinion that is a feeling that God is pleased to allow us to enjoy, I believe God wants us, wants the new man in Christ who is walking in obedience to feel good about himself.

In spite of all the accusations that the Corinthians brought against Paul he was not intimidated for he was able to write back and tell them our rejoicing is this: The testimony of our conscience. They could not rob him of that sense of well-being. (*2 Corinthians 1:12*)

As a further observation on this point I offer this; The person who is most entitled to feel good about himself is the very one that is the least concerned about doing so. Isn't that the way it is?

Here is a quote that I found very interesting: "The meek are those who are not for ever thinking about themselves. They are too big to be greatly concerned about how they are treated or how highly others estimate them, they are so bent upon their purpose, not a high one but an unselfish one, they are so concerned with service to God and others that they have little time to wonder what sort of figure they are cutting in the world."

That has in it the ring of truth.

Fifthly from a biblical perspective there are conditions that need to be met before one is entitled to feel good about himself.

The concept that one can live however he pleases and still feel good about himself is neither biblical nor workable. In the Bible we learn that sometimes we need to feel worse about ourselves before we can feel better about ourselves. James in his fourth chapter tells inconsistent church members: "Be afflicted and mourn and weep, let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to heaviness." (*James 4:9*)

On the spiritual level before one can expect to feel acceptance with God he needs to repent of his sin, he needs to surrender himself to God. This also comes through in this second beatitude of our Lord: "Blessed are they that mourn for they shall be comforted." (*Matthew 5:4*) The one who

mourns over his spiritual poverty may not be feeling good about himself as they advocate, but paradoxical as it may seem he is the one who finds healing and comfort, he is the one who finds acceptance with God, he is the one, the only one released from the burden of guilt.

After one has started out on that godly course the way to retain that good feeling about oneself is to respond to the call of obedient discipleship. If you know these things Jesus said, happy are ye if you do them. Why, oh why, are they so silent about the biblical stated conditions that need to be met before one is entitled to feel good about himself? Really until one is converted he should definitely not feel good about himself if he does he is deceived. *Romans 8:1* "There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus." But until that point there is condemnation upon the soul, until you are a new man in Christ you have no valid grounds for feeling good about yourself and even then you have got to thank more than yourself.

This principle that I have introduced is applicable in other areas of life. Before one can feel good about himself in a right way he must have a reason for doing so, he must have met some conditions.

To further illustrate this point here is a paragraph from a book by Brother Lloy A Kniss.

I am quoting now. "A teenage daughter was home for a three-month vacation from school. Brother Lloy says I asked her mother why she did the cooking, dish washing and cleaning herself while the daughter sat idly by? She, the mother said: When my daughter comes home for only a little while I don't think I ought to make her work." This was clearly the mother's mistake."

And I would add that the daughter was at fault too.

Now get this next sentence. "There are really very few things which will build self-respect as well as when a child knows that he has not been idle while others are working." It is really no wonder if that teenage girl develops a poor self image problem. When teenagers run around spending other people's hard earned money to have what they call a good time they are robbing themselves of a basis for self-respect and the day may come when they will wonder why they have so little sense of self-worth."

This same principle is applicable on the educational level. The current concern about the preservation of the pupils' self-esteem is really having a reverse effect. Some time ago I was handed an article that appeared in the US News and World Report.

I would like to read to you now a paragraph from that article.

"The obsession with self-esteem ultimately undermines real education. When the self-esteem movement takes over school teachers are under pressure to accept every child as is. To keep children feeling good about themselves you must avoid all criticism and almost any challenge that could conceivably end in failure. In practice this means that each child like a fragile therapy consumer is in constant need of an ego boost. Difficult work is out of the question and standards get lowered in school after school, even tests become problematic because someone might fail them."

This writer's point is that you can never build self-esteem amongst pupils by the method that is now being advocated. Well I would go a step further and even question the validity of that aim, the aim to build self-esteem but I do believe that self-respect and possibly a modest self-worth feeling is compatible with Christian thinking and these qualities are by-products of an educational system in which pupils are guided through course after course in which they are confronted by graded challenges. By successfully meeting those challenges the pupil gains a hard earned sense of achievement. It is that kind of experience that is needed for the building of self-respect and legitimate self-worth feelings.

Well that is the conclusion of this long section in which I have emphasized that there are conditions that need to be met before one has a moral right to feel good about himself. It is a mistake to try and make people feel good about themselves before they have adequate grounds for doing so.

Number six. From a biblical perspective we are more in line with the purposes of God when we promote God's measure of self-esteem.

It is a mistake to try and make people feel good about themselves. We are more in line with the purposes of God not when we promote a high self-esteem but a low self-esteem. Contrary to the claims of the self-esteem teachers we must insist that humility is not a vice but a virtue, and it is a rare

virtue, because pride is perhaps the most universal and most deep-seated, deeply rooted of all other sins.

Nowhere to my knowledge does the Bible evidence any concern about people having too little self-esteem and there are therefore no directions given for enhancing self-esteem. On the contrary we do read: “This I say to every man did is among you not to think of himself any more highly than he ought to think.” (*Romans 12:3*) Every man without exception needs that warning. Nothing is said there or elsewhere about under evaluating one's self, for the Holy Spirit knows that that is not a likely possibility, under evaluating one's self.

And that *Romans 12:3* passage bearing in mind was written to whom? To converted people. They are the ones who are being warned not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, an indication of how deep-seated the sin of pride is. I know the popular claim is that self-esteem is not pride but anything that is a next door neighbour to pride had better not be promoted. But, they say; Isn't humility a feeling of inferiority and doesn't that paralyze one's usefulness and is in fact very unbecoming for a creature who bears the image of God?

No. One may be honestly humble and yet not feel inferior.

The Apostle Paul for example, I don't think he felt inferior do you? And yet I know that he was humble, very humble.

In fact this is the very person that is most useful to God, the person who is little in his own eyes while at the same time recognizing that he is a graciously God accepted, God endowed, a God enlisted person. That is the kind of person that is most useful to God, that combination of humility and recognition of God-given abilities.

Number seven. From the biblical perspective any system that promotes the preoccupation with self in any of its forms is at cross purposes with the plan of God.

Seldom do we read in self-worth literature about self-denial and yet that is the one emphasis that runs through all the New Testament, self-denial. Instead of being patted and pampered self is to be denied. Self and Christ are so opposite that in order to say Yes to Christ, I must say No to self. In-

stead of telling people to feel good about yourself, God wants us to warn them that there is a criminal inside of them that needs to be put to death daily.

All right for a change of position let's stand for a few moments and while you are standing let's repeat together *Galatians 2: 20*.

"I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ li-
veth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of
the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me."

Alright you may be seated.

What does that first tell us? It tells us that in Paul's life Christ had taken the place of self and that is the way it ought to be in your life and in my life, that is God's plan, self blotted out, Christ brought into the centre of life.

The self-esteem gospel has in it too much of self and too little of Christ.

Number eight. From the biblical perspective the value of a man about which so much is said lies not so much in what he is as in what God is able to make him through the process of regeneration.

Unless one places himself in God's hand as clay in the hand of the potter (*Isaiah 64:8*) his potential worth to men and to God will never be realized, and that fact should humble all our human pride. Yes, the saint is the workmanship of God and for that very reason we have no grounds for congratulating ourselves. Michelangelo could take hold of an ugly misshapen hunk of stone or rock and make out of it something beautiful. We dare never forget that we were once that ugly chunk of clay and were it not for the grace of God we would still be worthless clay because of what sin has done to us. Whether we have received one talent or 10 talents all we have has been received from God and therefore all our rejoicing and all our boasting ought to be in the Lord alone.

One man made this very significant observation: "The doctrine of grace humbles man without degrading him and exalts him without inflating him."

"O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!"
(*Romans 11:33*)

Only God could conceive of a plan like that, a plan that humbles man without degrading him and exalts him without inflating him.

Number nine. From the biblical perspective anything less than a divinely grounded personal confidence is a wrongly grounded confidence.

The Apostle Paul was a man with a pedigree. He once placed his confidence in that pedigree, at that stage in his life he had the kind of self image that people are urged to have today but a big change occurred in Paul's life and so by the time that he wrote to the Philippians a big shift of confidence had occurred so that he could write: We have no confidence in the flesh. (*Philippians 3:1-10*)

That did not mean however that he had now adopted an “I can't do anything” attitude. Paul in that same epistle makes this astounding claim: I can do all things through Christ.

That was not an expression of pride but rather an expression of faith and confidence in Christ. Instead of self-esteem that was Christ esteem.

A few moments ago I said that anything less than a divinely grounded confidence is a wrongly grounded confidence now I hasten to add that it however it gives no one the license to go around with no confidence at all, refusing to undertake this or that because it is beyond what his own puny powers can accomplish. That is following in the footsteps of the 10 spies, those who had that grasshopper complex. (*Numbers 13:5-33*) Their grasshopper complex was due to their not having a God grounded confidence, in contrast to them Joshua and Caleb said: We are well able to overcome it.

And that was a realistic appraisal of what they could do with confidence grounded in God. If you choose to call that self-confidence you ought to add that it is self-confidence born of confidence in God.

My concern is this: Along with our criticism of the self esteem we need to be balanced and that requires that we criticize also the Christian who goes to the other extreme and feels comfortable with what I call a grasshopper complex for that is not the innocent thing that it appears to be, that portrays the presence of unbelief and unbelief is sin. It is like saying God: I don't believe your promises, I don't believe I can do what you ask me to do, I don't believe you will make your help available.

That is unbelief, that too is wrong.

And now lastly number 10. From the biblical perspective arriving at a wholly accurate self image is a long, and generally a long slow painful journey. Getting to know oneself is a greatly underestimated venture.

God's description of the human heart ends on this note: Who can know it, (*Jeremiah 17:9*) who can know it?

We seemingly all have blind spots especially when our eyes turn inward. We can see a splinter in the eyes of another and all the while be blind to a plank in our own eye, (*Luke 6:41-42*) Our capacity for self deception is almost frightening. And putting on a false front is so much a part of sinful human nature that it hinders the forming of a correct self image.

We have taken a big step however when we arrive at where the prodigal was when he came to himself, at that point the prodigal son saw himself as he never before saw himself. We must come to the point where the prodigal did when he came to himself.

But that is not the end of the journey. Early in his life Paul calls himself the least of the Apostles. In *1 Corinthians 15:9* halfway through he claims to be less than the least of all saints and in *Ephesians 3:8* and just before he died he humbly calls himself the chief of sinners. *1 Timothy 1:15*.

The higher a man gets in divine grace the lower he will get in his own self-esteem.

One minister confessed:

“I was never of much use until I concluded that God did not intend for me to be a great man.”

When he got his self image corrected then his usefulness began to multiply.

Well may God help each one of us to help us to form a healthy Christian self image and that will consist of seeing yourself as God sees you.

No more, no less.

For your encouragement I urge you to remember that He who knows you best loves you most.

Isn't that encouraging!