

## *Self-Respect or Self-Esteem.*

*From a message given at:*

*Centerville Mennonite Church, November 2008.*

Grace, mercy and peace be our portion as we have met with the divine presence with us here in this gathering this morning.

I greet you in the name of Jesus to bring you greetings from the brethren and sisters in Missouri.

I invite you to turn with me to second Timothy chapter 3 this morning for an opening Scripture. We are going to be turning to a number of scriptures this morning, you don't need to turn to them all but I would like you to turn to some as you can.

Second Timothy three, I am going to begin with reading verses 1 to 5.

This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. <sup>2</sup>For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, <sup>3</sup>Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, <sup>4</sup>Traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; <sup>5</sup>Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. [2 Tim. 3:1-5.](#)

There are several reasons given here in verse two as to why the last days will be dangerous and one of these is because of men being lovers of their own selves. That means men will be fond of self.

If you analyse this list given here in verses 2 to 4 most of the categories that are mentioned it seems to stem from all our own outworking of the love of self and then verse five gives this admonition it says; From such turn away.

The subject that I have chosen to share this morning is one that was assigned to me some time ago it is " Self-Respect or Self-Esteem." And this subject I believe is an important one, one that comes real close to each of us and it is maybe in a sense a delicate subject in some ways but we want to look at the scriptures and learn some things in relation to this subject.

The subject has to do with self or the entire person or the individual of me. For that we could say it has to do with our regards as to how we look

at self and it implies an evaluation or an estimation of our self and our title indicates by the word or that there is an alternative and we can do this or this. We can have self-esteem or self-respect. There is two different ways that we can look at ourselves.

I would first endeavour to define the terms that we find in our title: Self-respect and Self-esteem.

Looking at these definitions there are similarities between the two, in fact one definition of self-esteem is self-respect but self-esteem does not stop with self-respect the way I understand it, but the more encompassing definition of self-esteem is self conceit, it is an exaggerated opinion of one's own qualities our abilities, and when we think about that it brings some red flags in our mind does it not? To think of an exaggerated opinion of myself that brings the red flags.

An opinion or a view or a conclusion about myself that is not necessarily factual, it might be factual but then again it might be a step away from being factual and add to that some exaggeration and we have an overrated, overstated overemphasized opinion of oneself and we recognize that we don't have to look very far around us and we soon weary them do we not?.

Well the self-esteem concept has been alive through the ages and in a sense we could say it began with Lucifer. Let me read a few things from Isaiah 14 and notice self-esteem shining out here;

Lucifer said I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God, I also will sit on the Mount of congregation on the sides of the north, I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the most High. [Isaiah 14:13-14](#).

We could say truly self-esteem at its worst.

While this concept of self-esteem has been through the centuries, the popular use of this term mushroomed in the 1980's in America, self-esteem became not only an American fascination but an American infatuation and the self-esteem theory invaded the educational system, it was propelled in advice books and seminars, to doctors, to teachers, to managers, nurses and bankers and professionals alike.

Proponents portray self-esteem as that which would cure social ills and make life better. Low self-esteem became the explanation for many per-

sonal problems but at the very core of the self-esteem most meant an over-rated focus in view of self belief.

Now self-respect is a proper respect for oneself as a human being.

And here I highlight proper, proper respect as opposed to an exaggerated opinion.

One definition of proper is; Strictly accurately correct.

And so there can be inaccurate and correct regard for oneself.

And so the alternatives that we mentioned are: On one hand self-respect and a proper and correct consideration about myself - on the other hand self-esteem and overrated, overstated, overemphasized opinion of self.

Turn with me to Romans chapter 12, there is one for see that we want to notice,

[Romans 12:3](#) I believe suggests both these views of self.

"For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

This portrays a right way and a wrong way to evaluate ourselves and I see self-respect described here is one ought to think and thinking soberly, that means moderately and sensibly. And I see self-esteem described as thinking more highly of one self then we ought to think.

Now I mentioned how that in [second Timothy three](#) tells how the church in the last days will face perilous times because of their love of self and we faced such perils in our day.

There are dangerous theories and philosophies afloat out there, in the world we could, say that threaten to come in, that threaten to come into the church. But not only does this self-esteem threaten to come in from out there it also lurks within the very shadows of their own hearts.

Mark 7:21 tells us that from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evils, and one of those evils listed is pride, as all these come from within deity file the man. [Mark 7:21-23](#).

And so the threat is as close as our own heart, as close as our old nature could we say and certainly we want to keep our hearts with all diligence. [Proverbs 4:23](#).

In the second place considering the message then.

Some examples first of self-esteem and then self-respect and noticing some ways that these are expressed.

You may turn to second Samuel 15.

In second Samuel 15 we have the story of Absalom, David's son who was aspiring to take the kingdom after he had his father killed and in his aspiring and his conniving verse four gives us a bit of a window into his thinking, second Samuel 15 I will read verses 1 to 6.

“And it came to pass after this, that Absalom prepared him chariots and horses, and fifty men to run before him. <sup>2</sup>And Absalom rose up early, and stood beside the way of the gate: and it was so, that when any man that had a controversy came to the king for judgment, then Absalom called unto him, and said, Of what city art thou? And he said, Thy servant is of one of the tribes of Israel. <sup>3</sup>And Absalom said unto him, See, thy matters are good and right; but there is no man deputed of the king to hear thee. <sup>4</sup>Absalom said moreover, Oh that I were made judge in the land, that every man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me, and I would do him justice! <sup>5</sup>And it was so, that when any man came nigh to him to do him obeisance, he put forth his hand, and took him, and kissed him. <sup>6</sup>And on this manner did Absalom to all Israel that came to the king for judgment: so Absalom stole the hearts of the men of Israel.” [2 Samuel 15:1-6](#).

It seems that likely Absalom's statement: “No man being deputed of the King” was likely an accurate statement because the King generally heard difficult cases himself and it was typical according to history that it was typical court procedure in the east the King would sit for an hour or maybe more in the morning to hear causes and to receive petitions. Verse two tells us Absalom rose up early and stood by the gate and when any man came, noticed that they were on their way to the King and he would stop them and call them aside and assure them that their case was legitimate and the problem is that the King's provisions are inadequate to help.

Then in verse four he presents himself as better able to deal with the weaknesses in the system, but would we say that it would be shuddering to see the system handed over to one so confident as Absalom? He saw in himself the qualities that it would take to meet out justice and that to every man, notice in verse four: That any man which hath any suit or cause might come unto me and I would do him justice.”

He presented the idea that he would have 100 percent justice right if only his qualities would be tapped.

Well self-esteem, an overrated opinion of one's ability, I believe that Absalom would score rather high in that. Self-esteem advocates uphold believing in oneself as the means to success and to reaching one's goals, and we certainly see that in Absalom in his statement about himself and what he would accomplish if only he would be in office. It might remind us some of politicians today. You know politicians freely promise voters of all they will do and how well they will serve the interests of the people if they are voted in, though many times they are not experienced, not proven candidates, so often when they come into office reality sets in and they become one more normal person in office and nothing mystical happens after being voted in.

Well it is easier to think of what all would get done if we were in charge and it is so easy for us to get caught in the same trap that Absalom did.

You might hear statements like this: If I were the President I would have the troops out of Iraq or the bear within a week.

Or maybe closer home you have heard someone say: If I was the bishop I would do thus and so.

Maybe statements like that can be made humbly but it could on the other hand reveal an overestimation and belief in oneself as we see in Absalom. Likely if we were there well things wouldn't look so clear and simplified any more. We recognise that it is a spirit that is so native to each of us.

Another example we find in Luke 16 a familiar story, we find the unjust steward and he was about to lose his job and he said there in [Luke 16:3](#): "What shall I do? I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed."

I don't want to misread what this man is saying but according to some Bible scholars they believe that what he was saying was not that he could not dig but rather that he would not, he would not stoop to being a day labourer or be involved in such base employment, that it was in other words beneath his dignity to dig.

And maybe we would say: Well we wouldn't choose such a hard job either.

But would we say that if we were to choose between digging and dishonesty certainly it is right to choose the honest hard labour.

It is reminding me of what I was told by a missionary who served in church outreach Ethiopian and he said it is a challenge to keep the native young men busy, there is a fair bit of shovel work available but the mentality there is that diggers are among the lower class and they are ashamed to dig.

Maybe too it is a bit like the young man who is job-hunting and in order to meet the criteria for drawing unemployment and if someone offered him the job of splitting wood he didn't want that job, he wasn't interested, you know it reveals a mindset.

For some maybe it is the issue of carrying a lunch box or being a hired labour versus self-employment. But let's remember both are needed and I don't believe that either status should either raise or lower once regard of himself.

Maybe along with this steward we could think of Naaman the ruler of Syria.

It seems that possibly he, like the steward, had an enlarged self image and it seems it was mighty hard for him to stoop down to dip himself in the muddy Jordan. It almost seems that his image was more important to him than his very life for he was turning away in a rage to go back to Syria a leper, but I marvel at his sensible servants and how they were able to bring him to a right perspective and to a joyous ending. ([2 Kings 5:9-16](#))

Well another example of an expression of self-esteem found in the scriptures is found especially in Paul's writings. He uses the terminology of being puffed up, he uses that various times, and to the Corinthians in first Corinthians chapters 4 and 5, I'll just read a few verses to you from there. [1 Cor. 4:21 - 5:2](#).

"What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness? It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. <sup>2</sup>And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you."

I would highlight the phrase here in verse two; ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned. In other words you are blown up, you are inflated, and in their inflated state they were insensible to sin and a serious condition that this brother was in, they felt good about the tolerance of sin but the Scriptures say the wisdom of God is first pure and then peaceable (James 3:17) and that would tell us that we dare not sacrifice principle for peace.

Many modern psychologists today in trying to bring rest to the emotionally disturbed are advocating this very thing and that is to do away with a conscience, to have peace rather than deal with the cause of the guilt.

Here is one example. One psychology therapist climaxed an interview with a strong attack upon the patient's conscience. I'm going to read a few paragraphs where he threatens that she will never be released from treatment until she does away with her moral values and listen to some excerpts from this interview now:

"Your problem actually is the fact that you have what I call a lot of should's, ought to's and must's which unfortunately you were taught when you are very young. You were taught these by your father, your mother, your church, but if you didn't have this concept of ought's, which unfortunately is nicely defeating your own ends, then you wouldn't be disturbed."

After an objection by his patient to this attack the therapist told her:

"You are fully entitled to your views but unfortunately as long as you maintain them you are going to sit in this mental hospital and when you change your views you are going to get out."

Now how much further off could one be?

I recognise that not all psychologists have this approach and we are glad that they don't but too many, too many in our day do. I also recognise that not all emotional disturbances or mental distress are caused because of guilt, I recognise that too, and yet we must recognise that modern psychology by and large is off-track.

Another example from the scriptures is in Luke 18 and again it is a familiar story, it tells there about the Pharisee and the publican who were praying and it tells us that:

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, and we know about that prayer, and he went on to say a lot of good things about himself, he spoke much about himself.

And you will find those that ascribe to the self-esteem theory and courage persons to believe that it is acceptable as well is desirable to be preoccupied with oneself, praise oneself, and could we say as this Pharisee did.

In fact not only is preoccupation with self legitimate it is many times obligatory and one example would be sometimes scholars even a third grader for example may be required to complete sentences such as this: "Yes, I love myself even though I sometimes... blank....." Even though the child sometimes does throw a temper tantrum yet they are asked to complete this statement: "I love myself even though .....blank....." and then they fill in the blank. Well the thought is that children need to be taught to like themselves and we recognise that the scriptures do not teach that but rather the scriptures say that no man ever yet hated his own flesh.

And I think that brings into focus that child training is one of the areas that we face the perils of self-love.

One reminder here for us, maybe parents and teachers, you know in commendation or in criticism let's focus on the action rather than on the person. Maybe I'll touch on some of that little later.

Now we've looked at some examples in the Scripture of self-esteem now let's notice briefly a few examples of self-respect.

And going in mind again to Luke 18 and the story thereof the Pharisee in the publican, focusing now on the publican, he said: God be merciful to me a sinner. [Luke 18:13](#). He had a proper review of himself, he saw himself as a sinner who was in need of help of God and we could say he was seeing himself as God saw him. And recognizing the sin nature in oneself apart from God is an important aspect I believe of self-respect.

Another example we find in Daniel. When he was called to interpret dreams of the King, for Nebuchadnezzar, he was asked: "Art thou able to make known unto me the dream?" And part of Daniel's response was there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, there is a God in heaven [Daniel 6:26-28](#). Further he said: "But as for me, this secret is not revealed to me for any wisdom that I have more than any living" [Daniel 2:30](#). You see Daniel had a healthy view of himself, he was willing to be used of God but to give God the glory.

Isn't that what God wants from us? Certainly He does.

Another example we find in Paul, let me read to you a few verses again from first Corinthians 15, I'll read verses 8 through 10, Paul is talking here in the first part of first Corinthians 15 about how the Apostles saw Christ and then he says:

"And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. <sup>9</sup>For I am the least of the apostles, that am not meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God. <sup>10</sup>But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me." [1 Cor. 15:8-10](#).

Here he calls himself the least, elsewhere he says that he is a less than the least, ([Ephesians 3:8](#)) and verse 10 is what I would highlight here and that is; That I am what I am by the grace of God. This is a healthy attitude about anything good that we are or do.

When we see someone in sin can we say: But for the grace of God, but for the grace of God there am I if it was not for the grace of God. Certainly it is a humble perspective of self that we need to maintain.

Finally in the last part of the message. How can we foster self-respect?

And some of these points are very closely related but we will endeavour to benefit.

The first I have is that we foster self-respect by regarding ourselves as human beings created by God. And on one hand in creating us God gave us life, human life is sacred and therefore we don't take our life into our own hands to destroy it, human life is sacred and we respect it.

On the other hand being created by God we accept ourselves as God made us, our hair colour, our physical make up, it is not proper self-respect to make ourselves or wish ourselves to be different to what God designed us to be and we are aware that the world goes to great lengths and costs we could say to remake themselves. Maybe anything from using make up to facelifts to changes even more extreme than that but this is certainly not respecting oneself as God created them.

To respect oneself is to accept oneself as God made him and placed him and finding rest in that.

Now we recognise that to work on our characteristics, our flat spots, and personality flat spots or traits to change that is different, that's different and the Lord gives us direction in the Scriptures as to what He would like to see in our character and personality and it is right that we work on that.

Secondly we foster respect...

We foster self-respect by seeing ourselves as human beings with souls that are accountable to God. [Ezekiel 18:4](#) says God says: "Behold, all souls are mine." And thus we are not our own but rather we are God's and we then are responsible to be what He wants us to be.

[1 Corinthians 6:19-20](#)

"What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? <sup>20</sup>For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's."

And so we think of our worth in terms of God's ownership of us and His plan for our lives as revealed in His Word. As we contemplate what God wants us to be and doing that takes the focus off of self and of thinking how great we are, we ought to think on the other hand that we are of no value. You see we don't come to that conclusion because we see ourselves as God's. One soul, each soul is worth more than the whole world to God.

However our lives are not our own to splurge on ourselves or to waste selfishly but to invest to the glory of God.

[Revelation 4:11](#) says:

"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."

We recognise that God not only gives us life but He gives us purpose for life.

And we could think of the kettle as it goes on the manufacturing plant to the warehouse and then to the store shelf and no matter how sturdy that kettle was built really its purpose is not fulfilled until the kettle gets to the kitchen and the cook puts it to use.

And just so and unless and until our lives come into harmony with God's will and bring glory to Him it is then that our lives find purpose and fulfilment.

So could we say that we foster self-respect by fulfilling the purpose for which we were created.

Moving then on to the next point, number three. We foster self-respect when we see ourselves with a choice. And like I said some of these are closely related.

Let me read to you [Romans 6:16-18](#),

"Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? <sup>17</sup>But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. <sup>18</sup>Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness."

We see ourselves as different from the rest of creation because we choose how to act and to respond and leave, how to conduct ourselves, and consequently as creatures of choice we are also responsible and accountable beings.

[Romans 14:12](#) says: "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God."

Personal accountability.

It is important that as parents we develop this mentality in our children in this matter of personal accountability. This is we could say another glitch in modern psychology, rather than to help one to understand their own responsibility for their own behaviour they try to make them the victim of circumstances. You know because of what your mother did when you were three or four years old that's why you act like this or maybe it was their father or their teacher did this or didn't do this and so now here you are.

And that is a wrong concept we need to teach our children responsibility.

The thought is that you have become what you are and you act as you do because of your environment. And we recognise that one's past can have a bearing on sometimes our past is not all perfect or ideal but let's recognise that largely we choose how to behave and respond and are accountable for the same.

With that we don't shield our children from the realities of life and death and disappointments that are a part of life, neither can we spare the rod lest we spoil the child but yet within a loving yet disciplined and structured en-

vironment we seek to teach them responsibility and accountability and thus develop a proper sense of self respect.

There is something that I have observed more in the last few years, maybe more in the recent past, maybe it appeals more to younger parents where parents will freely lavish commendation and praise on their children in order to bring out their best and it seems that the thought being that if we are positive enough toward our children by that we can bring the negatives around somehow. Maybe we could say the idea of more praise and less paddle.

How about it, will that philosophy work? I believe it is important that we understand the relationship of commendation and constructive criticism, by criticism not meaning scolding and nagging but meaning helpful instruction and correction, both are necessary commendation and correction, they are both needed but not in a 50/50 ratio. Maybe we could learn from Paul's epistles in relation to this.

He often gave commendations in this epistles but that was not the substance of his writing, the substance of his writing was instruction and correction. May we learn from that.

Praise should be a sprinkling, more like the seasoning in our food along the way, it is not the substance of child training, praise and commendation should not be the substance of our child training. Training up a child involves bending and pruning, the substance I believe is instruction, the correction and discipline could we say. And then certainly we don't want to forget the seasoning to of sincere commendation along the way but we don't want commendation to become a crutch that unless parents or later on in life employers and church leaders have to give commendation or a person feels worthless, we need to guard against that.

Number four we foster self-respect by maintaining the motto: "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me." [Philippians 4:13](#).

There is no glory to myself but to Christ who enableth, and Paul and Daniel I believe are good examples of this. And this is so opposite of today's self-esteem plan, I quote a saying that I read some time ago it said: "Remember you are only as good as you think you are. Think superhero!"

Well how far from the truth can we get?

The worldly philosophy of society around us brothers and sisters is not what we want to pattern after but rather we want to take lessons from the Scripture.

The truth of the matter is that you have become what you are and act as you do, we have become what we are because of Christ working in our lives and certainly we want to give Him the honour and glory for our lives. Christ will make us as good as we allow Him to make us.

[Philippians 2:13](#) says: "For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure."

No amount of good intentions or ambitions will accomplish what God wants for us, it takes the power of Christ and let's not forget that.

Number five foster self-respect as we possess the mind of Christ.

[Philippians 2:5](#) says: "Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus."

And I think as we look at Philippians 2 we could say the call is to cultivate a service mentality rather than a "serve me" spirit.

[Mark 10:45](#) says: "For even the son of man came not to be ministered unto but to minister."

And doesn't that fit well with Philippians 2? Philippians 2 is a classic chapter on humility and the condescension of Christ coming to minister. It says there that He made himself of no reputation. [Philp.2:7](#)

There are some folks would call that low self-esteem.

To think that He, who really was somebody, who was God in very fact, would be willing to wear a servant's robe. That to them would be low self-esteem.

I raise the question: How quick are we at times to take offence when someone insults our reputation? Let's remember that reputation and character are not necessarily synonymous. Let's be jealous about our character, that is really what we are before God and it is something that we need to be very careful about but sometimes we may need to lay down our reputation, that is what someone has portrayed us to be that's different, and one who thinks rightfully about himself is going to be slow to be offended.

Also to possess the mind of Christ is to have a God glorifying spirit, a God glorifying mentality rather than a display me spirit we could say. And

this may become very practical for sisters in home decorations and furnishings, maybe too in your sewing and adorning your children.

Is it your utmost goal to glorify God or do you follow the drive to express yourself?

You know there is varying talents and abilities and interests and tastes in relation to sewing and décor of homes and all of that but lets guard the self expression that would rob God of His rightful place and His rightful glory.

For the brethren. Our business pursuits and in our advertisements and young brethren your choice of clothing, your automobile image, those things say something about us, let's not forget that, they do reflect something about us.

Sometimes when I read some business advertisements brethren and maybe there is none of those here and thank the Lord if there is not, but the thought of: "We are not the biggest but the best!"

What kind of a statement does that make about us?

Or we could think of automobiles.

Sometimes when we look at how automobiles are decked out one gets the impression that: "I like me. Who do you like?"

And that is another exaggerated, another emphasis in our day that we want to be aware and certainly we find it all around us where this is the case in the world, but let's beware that it does not come into the church.

To let a child or youth express themselves and their own individuality is something that we parents need to give direction to that God might use us to help them to be what He would have them to be.

Let's help our children lest their attitude and their thoughts about themselves are ego boosting rather than God glorifying.

Self respect is fostered as we loose ourselves in Christ and in the brotherhood.

Fulfillment is found in serving rather than in self promotion.

May God help us to think soberly about ourselves and thus enjoy His blessing upon our lives.