

Self-Worth a Biblical Perspective

Criteria of Healthy Self-Esteem

(Excerpts from Counseling and Self-Esteem by D.E. Carlson)

Part of the difficulty in our developing personalities and our Spiritual life, is that we learn definitions that are inadequate or distorted. This may be attributed to misinformation or misconception. In any case it is important that we understand the Biblical view of what God wants us to understand about ourselves as He sees us, and as He wants us to be conformed to the image of Christ.

Definitions of a Biblical view.

1. HUMILITY IS NOT THE SAME AS HUMILIATION.

Humility is recognizing who we are as created by God. Being content with who we are, acknowledging that we have become one of God's children. To realize that I have worth and I am loved even if I have gone astray. Humility is the experience of knowing, accepting, loving, and sharing who we are while recognizing and appreciating who others are. Humility is accepting our strengths as well as our weaknesses.

2. PUTTING OFF THE SINFUL NATURE IS NOT THE SAME AS PUTTING DOWN OUR SELF.

The Apostle Paul wrote, (Ephesians 4:20-32) about "putting off" the old man and "putting on" the new man. Notice the positive difference between the phrases, "putting off, putting on and putting down". While scripture does not use the phrase "put self down," even though some Christian music does express itself in this way. Recognize that accepting our sinfulness is not the same as putting ourselves down. When John Newton wrote, "Amazing Grace! How sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me! He was expressing an accurate statement of his slave-trading life. He was not putting himself down; rather, he was recognizing his depravity and the overwhelming grace of God that had rescued him from his sin. Describing the sinful human condition is not the same as condemning or depreciating a person. Paul warns of the problem of this kind of thinking in Colossians 2:18, 23.

He commanded them to stop putting themselves down because that process leads to arrogant self-righteousness rather than to a vibrant spiritual life. We need to distinguish between, "putting oneself down" and putting off the old man." Paul addressed the issue in Ephesians 4:23-24..."be renewed in the spirit of your mind, and put on the new self, which in the likeness of God has been created in righteousness and holiness of the truth." That is truly good news to those of us who desire to be what God wants us to be! With Christ's power we can put off sin, selfishness, sensuality, impurity, greediness and futility. (See Ephesians 4:17-19), and put on righteousness and holiness which are God's likeness. It is good news for us who fear we cannot be what God wants us to be, and it is good news to those of us who are being less than God wants us to be!

3. SELF-DENIAL IS NOT EQUIVALENT TO SELF-DEGRADATION.

Self-denial is biblical concept but self-degradation is not. Self-denial means that I am willing to put off my sinful, selfish desires and behavior. It does not mean that I am going to put myself down or psychologically annihilate myself. Self-denial does not mean that I become nothing, no one, non-existent. It does mean that I am willing to let Christ come into my life and empower men to represent his redemption and grace. Self-denial means that I set aside my sinful, selfish desires for the benefit of myself, others, God and his Kingdom. Galatians 2:20 is instructive in understanding God's principal of self-denial. When Christ comes to live in us He replaces the "crucified self" with a "resurrected self." We need to affirm that we still have a self, and identity, a person hood that has been reclaimed, resurrected and is in the process of being renewed daily by Christ.

4. UNWORTHY IS NOT THE SAME AS WORTHLESS.

The Bible clearly teaches that we are of immense value and worth to God. We were bought with a price..(1 Corinthians 6:20). God willingly sacrificed His son to redeem mankind and to restore our relationship with him. We are unworthy of God's love, mercy, and grace. However, to confuse this teaching with worthlessness is inaccurate and emotionally damaging. (compare Ephesians 2:8,9 and vs.10)

5. SELF-LOVE IS NOT THE SAME AS SELFISHNESS.

Selfishness is an attitude that puts my needs before your needs and at your expense. Self love on the other hand is an attitude and behavior that considers you and your needs to be as important as mine. It also means that my needs and feelings are as important as yours and when I give them up, I do so voluntarily and graciously for your benefit. Christ modeled this concept in Philippians 2:4-7. If we are to nourish and cherish others, we must increase our ability to nourish and cherish ourselves. (See Ephesians 5:28)

6. SELF-AFFIRMATION IS NOT THE SAME AS SELF-CONCEIT.

To say "I can" is affirmation. To say "I'm Great" is conceit. Recognizing my abilities and spiritual gifts is necessary if I am to participate in the body of Christ. To downplay or to refuse to exercise my talent is to rob others of the benefits Christ has given them through me.

When persons are great at what they do, they have no need to proclaim greatness; they recognize their achievements without needing recognition of others. They accept what God has done through them.

7. SELF-WORTH IS NOT THE SAME AS SELF-WORSHIP.

My value as a redeemed creation of God is a theme throughout the Bible. I have value because of Who created me and chose to redeem me, not because of who I am or what I do. I affirm my significance as a child of God. I simply recognize my importance in the kingdom of God and I do not inflate my value. I have no need to exaggerate my significance. All that I experience, all that I see, hear, and feel is viewed in relation to God and His plan. I worship my Creator and Savior, valuing myself as a person made in the image of Christ. I reflect God's goodness and greatness through my obedience and service.

8. SELF-AWARE IS NOT THE SAME AS SELF-ABSORBED.

I need to be aware of who I am and what I feel, believe, value, perceive, say and act if I am to be responsible and constructive. This is called self-consciousness. To be aware only of myself is self-obsession, an immature personality trait. My awareness of my spiritual and emotional immaturity and selfishness makes it possible for me to change. Without awareness I have no chance to grow or to let you into my life. You can knock on the door, but you will get no answer or rejection.

To see ourselves as others see us may be difficult, but is crucial to self-awareness and satisfying relationships. Self-awareness is essential to healthy self-esteem because we cannot esteem ourselves without awareness of who we are.

"I am not what I hoped to be, I am not what someday I will be, but thank God! I am not what I once was." (Philippians 1:6)

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