



Self-Esteem Fallacy Unmasked Years Ago

Many professing Christians accept unbiblical teaching that emphasizes the need for good self-esteem. Because such teaching denies the truth of God's Word in many areas, the body of Christ should have rejected this self emphasis long ago.

Although decades of emphasis on self-esteem have produced no standard definition of that concept, many ideas underlying self-esteem theories originate from three humanistic psychologists: Carl Rogers (Humanist of the Year, 1964), Erich Fromm (Humanist of the Year, 1966) and Abraham Maslow (Humanist of the Year, 1967). Consequently, most self-esteem teaching conflicts with the Word of God, which should not be surprising. It is surprising, however, when some professing Christians embrace the world's wisdom over divine truth and welcome self-esteem teaching as though it is a gift from God. This purported gift has led to many other unbiblical corollaries, such as *forgiving self, loving self in order to love others, having a good self-image, or becoming self-actualized* in order to experience abundant life in Christ.

Christians should have rejected such concepts long ago. Instead, self-esteem teachings have continued, spurred on in the church by Christians who remain infatuated with self-esteem claims.

See Is Self-Love Biblical? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Is%20Self-Love%20Biblical.pdf>

The Folly of Good Self-Esteem at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/The%20Folly%20of%20Good%20Self-Esteem.pdf>

Is Dying to Self Really Necessary? at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Dying%20to%20Self.pdf>

Rejecting Popular Untruths: Forgiving Yourself and Forgetting Your Sins at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Rejecting%20Popular%20Untruths.pdf>

Since the early 1980's, many promoters of self-heresy have not been renowned humanists but, instead, are well-known leaders in the church world. In addition, supposedly Christian publishers have produced a printed avalanche of false teaching, based on what sells instead of what is truth. As a result, millions of unsuspecting believers have kept this heretical movement financially solvent by buying books and recordings by Christian personalities who echo the world's perspective on self-esteem.

In an environment devoted to popularity over truth, self-esteem proponents feed off one another. Hundreds of Christian psychologists, authors, educators, mental-health practitioners, and well-known pastors and teachers quote each other's written and verbal presentations to give supposed credence to the false teaching about self-esteem. Obviously, they have to quote each other, since there is not one verse in the Bible that legitimately supports their heretical claims.

The ease with which some professing Christians accept heresy highlights their gullibility and spiritual immaturity. This sad state of affairs is the inevitable consequence of losing a Berean perspective of scriptural study (Acts 17:11) and, as a result, departing from the totally sufficient Word of God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). A love of Scripture is replaced by itching ears (2 Timothy 4:3), an eagerness to follow after the world's wisdom (Colossians 2:8), an increasing love of self (2 Timothy 3:1-4), acceptance of false prophets, and a lack of love for others (Matthew 24:11-12).

Acts 17:11, Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day to see if what Paul said was true.

2 Timothy 3:16-17, All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, ¹⁷ so that the servant of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.

2 Timothy 4:3, For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.

Colossians 2:8, See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the elemental spiritual forces of this world rather than on Christ.

2 Timothy 3:1-4, But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God

Matthew 24:11-12, and many false prophets will appear and deceive many people. ¹² Because of the increase of wickedness, the love of most will grow cold.

Spiritual confusion is inevitable for believers who accept false teaching that promotes high self-esteem. Why? The need for high self-esteem does not come from Scripture but, instead, was birthed from the world's mix of untested philosophies and unproven theories. Sadly, many in the church have accepted these dubious claims as truth for years.

Numerous research findings challenge the so-called benefits of high self-esteem. These findings are troublesome for any self-esteem proponent, whether avowedly Christian or blatantly atheistic. If history teaches us anything, those in the world will refute or alter their self-theories while, paradoxically, those in the church will continue to cling to these disputed theories for years to come.

Much of the research refuting the self-esteem movement is readily available but largely ignored. For example, in the mid-1970's and into the 1980's, Samuel Yochelson and Stanton E. Samenow studied incarcerated criminals to determine common characteristics that might indicate rehabilitation possibilities. This study revealed that criminals do *not* have a problem with low self-esteem. In fact, tests of their self-esteem put these criminals in the healthy or above average range. The researchers discovered that there was not a single criminal "who believed he was evil. Each criminal thought of himself as a basically good person . . . even when planning a crime." (*excerpted from The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image by Jay Adams*)

Other observations detrimental to the self-esteem movement are widely known. For example, in 1990, the much touted California Task Force to Promote Self-Esteem and Personal and Social Responsibility predicted significant educational and societal benefits related to increased self-esteem in its citizenry. As Cal Watchdog.com (July 29,2010) stated, "Twenty years later, observers are hard pressed to find any evidence that the self-esteem task force solved any problem."¹

In her book *The Feel Good Curriculum: The Dumbing Down of America's Kids in the Name of Self-Esteem*, Dr. Maureen Stout noted (on page 121) . . . "we do not know whether self-esteem promotes achievement and good behavior, or the other way around. Although an enormous amount has been written about self-esteem, there is precious little in the way of evidence regarding its efficacy in these areas. On the contrary: The preponderance of the data illustrate that self-esteem is irrelevant in all areas of education."²

World magazine stated the following in the 1998 article *Feel good about yourself* [http://www.worldmag.com/1998/08/feel_good_about_yourself].

The notion that mental health and social success are tied up with a person's self-esteem has dominated popular psychology for decades . . . Now evidence is piling up that self-esteem does not deserve such a positive self-image. In the latest *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, a study shows that people with an unusually high self-esteem are more prone to aggression and violence.

An excerpt from a 2009 World magazine article titled *The self-esteem myth* [http://www.worldmag.com/2009/09/the_self_esteem_myth] stated:

The theory that promoting self-esteem in children provides wide-ranging benefits has been debunked. Again. A new book, *NurtureShock*, by Po Bronson and Ashley Merryman, takes a look at a variety of recent findings about child development. Among them is evidence that teaching self-esteem doesn't do children any good whatsoever.

Another World magazine article (2012) addressed the life span of the self-esteem movement in the article *The self-esteem bubble pops* [http://www.worldmag.com/2012/01/the_self_esteem_bubble_pops].

The fateful year 1969, celebrated equally for the Apollo moon landing and Woodstock, also saw the publication of Nathan Brandan's *The Psychology of Self-Esteem*. This was the book that inspired what some predicted would be a revolution in parenting and pedagogy. Now, finally, the self-esteem movement may be running out of . . . well, self-esteem. One reason is because it never worked.

With no reference to a biblical perspective, a USA Today (2/21/96) article also echoed the world's concerns over a preoccupation with the so-called benefits of self-esteem. This article began with an accurate rendition of "the lie" by saying,

"We've heard it so often, none of us questions whether it's actually true: You've got to feel good about yourself in order to succeed. The crusade to improve self-esteem has invaded every sector of life – public and private – but nowhere more pervasively than education. School reformers have spent millions of dollars in the past two decades trying to raise the self-esteem of poor achievers.

“But researchers now are questioning whether this money has been a good investment, since increases in self-esteem show little, if any, effect on actual achievement. U.S. students today measure higher than those from any other country on questions of self-esteem. Unfortunately, they don’t do nearly as well on math or science or reading, lagging far behind much of the industrial world in actual performance in these areas. Such evidence suggests American schools have wasted a lot of money and effort that could have been spent more productively on basic skills and more rigorous academic content. But the increased emphasis on self-esteem that has permeated American education may even be more pernicious than most critics assumed.

“Now a new study, published in the journal of the American Psychological Association, suggests raising self-esteem may actually be dangerous. According to three research psychologists who evaluated dozens of studies of violent behavior, high self-esteem is more often associated with violence than low self-esteem. The authors (Roy Baumeister of Case Western Reserve University and Joseph Boden and Laura Smart of the University of Virginia) acknowledge that their conclusions run counter to the conventional wisdom that low self-esteem is the source of most anti-social behavior. But their evidence for ‘the dark side of self-esteem’ is persuasive.”

These researchers discovered a strong disposition for violence in someone who had “high self-esteem” with no inclination to lower their self-appraisals. Rapists, terrorists, racists, and those perpetrating domestic abuse have a common denominator . . . high self-esteem.

Quoting from the USA Today article . . . “Baumeister and his colleagues suggest that efforts to raise self-esteem actually may be making the problems of violence worse. They said, ‘The societal pursuit of high self-esteem for everyone may literally end up doing considerable harm.’ All those inflated teen-age egos may be contributing to an explosion in youth violence that has only begun.”

Do you realize how potentially crippling these findings are to schools that concentrate on raising a student’s self-esteem? Do you realize how damaging these observations are to the books in the Christian market that encourage parents to do everything they can to raise their children’s self-esteem?

Will we see Christian leaders who have embraced self-esteem propaganda restructure their ministries as further research reveals even more flaws of the self-esteem movement? Will notable Christian publishers or organizations who have proclaimed the supposed need for high self-esteem now announce their error and ask for forgiveness? On the other hand, will notable Christians simply ignore, de-emphasize, or compartmentalize these research findings in order to maintain the status quo and financial stability of their ministries? Will many believers continue to embrace this false teaching even as those in the world expose this error?

For decades, followers of Christ have encountered intense opposition from fellow-believers who embrace the self-esteem movement. This opposition came from teachers and Christian school administrators, other parents, pastors, social workers, missionaries, and leaders of some of the most well-known Christian organizations.

It should be obvious to believers that God’s Word is completely sufficient and trustworthy to rule in any matter of life. The only question is whether or not professing believers will rely unwaveringly on the Word of God instead of worldly wisdom.

When it comes to the subject (and eventual industry) of self-esteem, many in the church disregard the truth of God’s Word. They allow man’s wisdom to rule. However, God will not be mocked on any subject that He has already established as truth. Findings that disprove self-esteem theories are but one example that convincingly exposes the consequences of following natural wisdom instead of divine truth.

Be assured of a never-ending assault on the truth of God’s Word. Followers of Christ should desire to become active in the battle for truth. Concerning the subject of self-esteem, you can help to slow down the on-going spiritual damage caused by Christian leaders who have promoted or continue to espouse self-esteem heresies. You can pray for them to have their eyes opened to the truth of God’s Word. Also consider writing them a letter. Write down what they have said on the subject of *self* and then ask them the following question pertaining to their proclamations on the subject: “Where in the Bible does it say that?” [*See Refuting False Teaching . . . For God’s Glory and Our Protection at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Refuting%20False%20Teaching.pdf>*]

*A comprehensive scriptural refutation to the self-esteem movement is available in **Scriptural Response to Self-Esteem Teaching** at <http://wordtruth.org/PDF/Scriptural%20Response%20to%20Self-Esteem%20Teaching.pdf>.*

God’s Word foretold that the widespread lack of discernment and subsequent love of self are indications that Jesus is coming soon (*see 2 Timothy 3:1-9, 13 and 4:1-4 printed at the end of this article*). While we await the return of our Lord Jesus Christ, pray for your own spiritual discernment as you study God’s Word. Apply the admonition given to elders in

Titus 1:9. An elder “must hold firmly to the trustworthy message as it has been taught, so that he can encourage others by sound doctrine and refute those who oppose it.”

In recent years, professing believers who promote false teaching with regard to self-esteem have taken a new tact. Amazingly, self-esteem proponents have tried to redefine this unbiblical concept with statements such as: “Self-esteem (or self-worth) really means to know one’s position in Christ.”

Do not be deceived. When the wisdom of the world introduced self-esteem claims decades ago, professing believers knew that “one’s position in Christ” was never one of self-esteem’s illusive definitions. Christian psychologists, well-known pastors, and popular authors didn’t change the worldly understanding of self-esteem when they originally wrote or spoke on the subject. Discerning believers should reject attempts by current leaders in the Christian world to try to redefine this false concept. This attempt to redefine a false concept may be an effort to save millions of dollars of inventory on bookstore shelves from being fireplace fodder, but any new definition of self-esteem has one thing in common with original perspectives regarding self-esteem . . . all of them lack scriptural support.

SO WHAT?

Many believers are ecstatic over confusion concerning erroneous beliefs that emphasize an exaltation of self. Hopefully, many unbelievers will recognize that man’s wisdom is futile and foolish and, as a result, will be drawn to biblical truth.

Pray that the many professing believers – especially high-profile pastors, authors, educational leaders, and Christian psychologists – who have proclaimed the world’s errors as truth will publicly acknowledge their error as openly as they have proclaimed their erroneous opinions. Perhaps, with such repentance and open confessions, many well-meaning but misguided believers will return to God’s Word as the all-sufficient source of truth and ultimate authority for life.

Believers who reject the world’s trap of redefining unbiblical solutions for problems of life also know that biblical truth isn’t authenticated by natural wisdom. Whether the world stumbles onto biblical truth or not doesn’t affect the vitality of a believer’s life that is centered on the Word of God. The world isn’t the verification agent for the Bible, but don’t be surprised when those in the world unknowingly stumble over the unchanging principles of God’s Word.

A FINAL WORD OF ENCOURAGEMENT

It is encouraging to realize that God by “His divine power has given us everything we need for a godly life through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness. Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature, having escaped the corruption in the world caused by evil desires” (2 Peter 1:3-4). Nothing offered by the world can match that reality!

2 Timothy 3:1-9, 12-13, But mark this: There will be terrible times in the last days. ² People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, proud, abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy, ³ without love, unforgiving, slanderous, without self-control, brutal, not lovers of the good, ⁴ treacherous, rash, conceited, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God— ⁵ having a form of godliness but denying its power. Have nothing to do with such people. ⁶ They are the kind who worm their way into homes and gain control over gullible women, who are loaded down with sins and are swayed by all kinds of evil desires, ⁷ always learning but never able to come to a knowledge of the truth. ⁸ Just as Jannes and Jambres opposed Moses, so also these teachers oppose the truth. They are men of depraved minds, who, as far as the faith is concerned, are rejected. ⁹ But they will not get very far because, as in the case of those men, their folly will be clear to everyone. . . . ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted, ¹³ while evildoers and impostors will go from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived.

2 Timothy 4:1-4, In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: ² Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³ For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. ⁴ They will turn their ears away from the truth and turn aside to myths.

Endnotes

1. Cal Watchdog.com @ <http://calwatchdog.com/2010/07/29/retrospective-a-state-of-esteem/>
2. [The Feel Good Curriculum: The Dumbing Down of America’s Kids in the Name of Self-Esteem](http://books.google.com/books?id=LBzBH2sJOvUC&pg=PA125&lpg=PA125&dq=views+against+CA+Task+force+on+self+esteem&source=bl&ots=nYz0ouTMXG&sig=0Zw6t_XsNA2csUmIhfE4TIVYA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=Jnl7VKDkDer-iALg-IHwCA&ved=0CFQQ6AEwBw#v=onepage&q=views%20against%20CA%20Task%20force%20on%20self%20esteem&f=false), Maureen Stout, Ph.D. @ http://books.google.com/books?id=LBzBH2sJOvUC&pg=PA125&lpg=PA125&dq=views+against+CA+Task+force+on+self+esteem&source=bl&ots=nYz0ouTMXG&sig=0Zw6t_XsNA2csUmIhfE4TIVYA&hl=en&sa=X&ei=Jnl7VKDkDer-iALg-IHwCA&ved=0CFQQ6AEwBw#v=onepage&q=views%20against%20CA%20Task%20force%20on%20self%20esteem&f=false