



The Folly of Good Self-Esteem

In educational and psychological circles, one is bombarded with the need for “good self-esteem.” Never mind that these same schools of thought cannot agree on what comprises good self-esteem or how self-esteem can even be defined or measured. Despite disagreement about what it is or how it can be obtained, good self-esteem is touted as the cornerstone of positive character development.

As in all aspects of life, human wisdom cannot be compared with God’s viewpoint, since human wisdom is foolishness with God (1 Corinthians 3:19-20). Believers who value the Word of God know that self-esteem, good or bad, is not the issue. The Bible, instead, presents an accurate view of “self” that can lead to growing relationships with God and others . . . by dying to self instead of esteeming it.

God’s truth describes the natural self in vivid terms, especially with regard to its orientation to sin and inability to know God. In one’s natural state, there is spiritual death, a desire to gratify fleshly lusts, and a willingness to follow Satan (Ephesians 2:1-3). In one’s natural state, a person is unable to understand the things of God (1 Corinthians 2:14) and faces God’s wrath and judgment (Romans 1:18).

Religious proponents of the value of self-esteem typically say that humans were created in the image of God, which is true (Genesis 5:1). After Adam sinned, however, his descendants were “after his [Adam’s] likeness” (Genesis 5:3), which was marred by sin. This distortion of God’s image carried with it a natural bent toward ungodliness, a natural desire to live for self (desire gratification), and inevitable physical death.

God’s view of mankind’s natural state does not help one have good self-esteem. Scripture makes it clear that, left to ourselves, we are like mist (James 4:14), dust (Psalm 103:14), and just a breath and passing shadow (Psalm 144:4). From God’s perspective, we are corrupt (Psalm 14:3), stupid and devoid of knowledge (Jeremiah 51:17a) and unable to direct our own steps wisely (Jeremiah 10:23). We may have some natural talents, but Who gave them to us? All that we have is from the Lord, not ourselves, which should give us a clue as to Whom we should esteem.

When Truth’s spotlight shines on the natural state of self, what is there to be proud of? What aspect of self allows any of us to stand before God and claim that, apart from Him, we are truly OK? What is there about self that provides a biblical basis for anyone to have good self-esteem no matter how it is defined?

When God’s Truth about self is accepted, then efforts to have good self-esteem are exposed as a futile way to give glory to self instead of to Christ. A drive for good self-esteem diverts attention from the two relational perspectives that really matter – loving God and loving others (Matthew 22:37-39). The Bible gave the answer to the self-esteem question long ago – die to self (Luke 9:23-24). The love of self, however, continues to parade in its costume of good self-esteem, fighting to the death to keep from going to the grave.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

1 Corinthians 3:19-20, For the wisdom of this world is folly with God. For it is written, “He catches the wise in their craftiness,” and again, “The Lord knows the thoughts of the wise, that they are futile.”

Ephesians 2:1-3, And you were dead in the trespasses and sins in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.

1 Corinthians 2:14, The natural person does not accept the things of the Spirit of God, for they are folly to him, and he is not able to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.

Romans 1:18, For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who by their unrighteousness suppress the truth.

Genesis 5:1, This is the book of the generations of Adam. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God.

Genesis 5:3, When Adam had lived 130 years, he fathered a son in his own likeness, after his image, and named him Seth.

James 4:14, yet you do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Psalms 103:14, For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are dust.

Psalms 144:4, Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow.

Psalms 14:3, They have all turned aside; together they have become corrupt; there is none who does good, not even one.

Jeremiah 51:17a, Every man is stupid and without knowledge . . .

Jeremiah 10:23, I know, O LORD, that the way of man is not in himself, that it is not in man who walks to direct his steps.

Matthew 22:37-39, And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself.”

Luke 9:23-24, And he said to all, “If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will save it.”