



# Humility

## Low self-esteem is not the chief problem

**Philippians 2:3 - Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.**

### What does this verse tell us we should do?

Esteem others better than your self

### What does it mean to esteem others better than your self?

To put the interests of others ahead of your own.

### How do we put the interests of others ahead of your own?

- Show respect for others.
- Figure out the needs of others and address them.
- Be more of a listener than a talker.
- Put your selves in the other shoes so to speak and look at things from their perspective.

### Is this an easy thing to do, to esteem others more highly than yourself?... Why?

- No... It is our nature to be selfish, to put ourselves ahead of all others, including God.
- Notice that parents do not teach their children to act selfishly, this is not learned behavior, it is natural behavior.

### How does treating others with respect show God's love?

- It is what God demonstrated to us when He set aside Himself to meet our needs ahead of Himself.
- It is a rare thing in this world and it will stand out as being unique.

### What shouldn't we do?

Be selfish, ambitious, or conceited.

### What does it mean to be selfish?

To put yourself ahead of others

### Why is ambition condemned here? Isn't ambition a good thing?

- The term ambition is modified with the adjective selfish. Ambition for the group you are in or for others is a good thing. Ambition for yourself alone is selfishness.
- Ambition for self is usually at the expense of others.

### Isn't ambition just another word for healthy competition? Isn't competition a good thing?

- Good competition is that which encourages other to achieve more than they would have without it. This kind of competition is in the best interest all participants. Unhealthy competition is like selfish ambition where there are winners that achieved their success at the expense of others.

### What does it mean to be conceited?

Having an excessively high opinion of ones worth or value.

### How do you harmonize this verse with the teaching that the root of most social problems is insufficient self-esteem?

- You can not. The idea that low self-esteem is the root cause of most social problems is a product of human psychological theory, it is not biblical truth.
- Any serious student of the Bible should realize the Bible is strangely silent about the problem of low self-esteem. Isn't it interesting that while the psychologists are virtually silent about people having too much self-esteem, but constantly refer to the problem of having too little, the Bible says almost nothing about us thinking too little of ourselves, but has a great deal to say about us thinking too highly of ourselves?

### How do people use low self-esteem to explain problems people have?

- Let a child bring home a poor report card, and it is obviously a case of low self-esteem. If a boy is a bully and is always getting into fights, it must be because he does not love himself enough.
- From the primitive "every day and in every way I'm growing better and better" to sophisticated creeds and study books, psychologists, ministers, and various "experts" were doing everything in their power to convince us how wonderful we are.

### Let's look at a biblical example... Where did Satan go wrong? What does the Bible have to say about his problem, too little or too much self-esteem?

Isaiah 14 gives us a vivid description of his attitude of the heart as he tried to wrest the universe from God's control:

Isaiah 14:12-14 – "How you are fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! How you are cut down to the ground, you who weakened the nations! For you have said in your heart: 'I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God; I will also sit on the

mount of the congregation on the farthest sides of the north; I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High."

**What evidence is there in this passage that Satan had a pretty high opinion of himself?**

- Notice all the "I will's. Satan sure wasn't suffering from low self-esteem. In fact he had such a "healthy" sense of self-esteem, he was prepared to take over the universe!
- Note that pride is the opposite of humility.

**What about bullies, how does a low self-esteem cause them to act the way they do?**

It doesn't, not only is this idea illogical, it is not supported by scientific study. In cases where psychologists have actually studied this by interviewing and testing boys who were identified as school bullies, they have found that the average bully has a high sense of self-esteem!

**How does what the Bible have to say about the cause of Satan's problem help us understand why bullies are the way they are?**

The ultimate bully of the cosmos, Satan himself, thinks very highly of himself. It's small wonder, then, that those who faithfully serve him should reflect their master's attitude.

**Was World War II caused by Adolf Hitler's lack of self-esteem? Could the whole war have been avoided if only some psychologist could have been there to tell him that he was wonderful and lovable?**

Mr. Hitler already knew he was wonderful, so wonderful that it was of the utmost importance that he rule the world as quickly as possible!

**Of course most sinners are not Hitlers. There are millions of ordinary everyday sinners who are decent, hard-working tax-paying, P.T.A. attending individuals. Could it be that they would quickly come to Christ if the church could only meet this need for a heightened sense of self-worth? Yet what is it that keeps the ordinary man away from Jesus Christ?**

It is surely the faulty notion that he can handle his own life apart from intimate fellowship with and dependence upon God. This is the ultimate in self-esteem, the very - attitude that Satan tempted Eve with when he said, "*Ye shall be as gods.*" The independent spirit is deadly.

**What are people doing when they believe they can live their life separate from God?**

Any person who truly believes he has what it takes to manage his own life irrespective of the will and purpose of God is surely suffering from delusions of grandeur. Our Lord Jesus tell us, "*Without Me you can do nothing.*"

**Considering that the Bible has so little to say about the problem of low self-esteem, and so much to say about the sin of overvaluing ourselves (aka pride), how do today's heralds of this gospel of self justify their position scripturally?**

- Of course many don't even bother. Self-esteem has attained such status by this point, that few folks seem to require Scriptural verification. To even dare question it would be nearly heretical in many churches and among many Christians.
- Yet, to their credit, some pastors do attempt to find Biblical evidence for the belief that man must love and think highly of himself. They don't have an easy time of it. There are very few Scriptures that even hint of such a doctrine. Nevertheless, two basic arguments have emerged, which men use to try to prove, by the Bible, that man's greatest need is to love and value himself...
- You can use the Bible prove any doctrine you want if you spiritualize passages, take them out of context and don't attempt to harmonize them with the rest of Scripture. Note: spiritualize means to apply some allegorical meaning to a verse when the plain sense meaning is intended.

## LOVING YOURSELF

The first argument comes from Jesus' command, "*You shall love your neighbor as yourself*" (Mat 22:39).

**How might Matthew 22:39 be thought of as promoting high self-esteem?**

- "There it is," they say. Jesus is clearly commanding us to love ourselves.
- Not content with that they usually go on to insist that it is not even possible to love anyone else until we first love ourselves...

Dr. David Burnes, director of the Institute for Cognitive and Behavioral Therapies said that we should start treating ourselves better. In his article "Steps to Self-esteem" he states: "You must learn to treat yourself the way you yearn to have others treat you." Apparently Jesus got the golden rule backwards! It was nice of him to straighten out our Lord.

**When Jesus tells us to love our neighbor as ourselves is He giving us two commands or one?**

- Is He saying love your neighbor and yourself, or love your neighbor as yourself?

- Please note that we don't have to be taught to love ourselves, this comes naturally. We are born loving ourselves. When children act selfishly, they are not demonstrating behavior taught by their parents, it is part of our fallen, sinful human nature.
- We can easily see the answer to this when we compare it to a similar passage in Ephesians. Paul writes:  
*"So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own bodies..."* (Eph 5:28).  
 Using the same reasoning given for the previous passage, I suppose Paul must be here commanding us to love our own bodies.  
 Furthermore he must also be saying that until we men can truly love our bodies, until we have come to have great and high thoughts about our bodies, it will be impossible for us to love our wives!

#### **The following image comes to mind:**

Here is a man whose marriage is nearly gone. He comes to his pastor for counsel, and frankly admits, "Pastor, the truth is I just don't love my wife anymore. I don't care a thing about her and I'm always treating her like dirt. The love is gone, the thrill is gone, there's just nothing left." The pastor, trained and steeped in humanism, opens his Bible. "My brother, I have the answer for you. The Bible says right here that men ought to love their wives as they do their bodies. Your problem is simple -- you don't love your body enough. How can you ever expect to love your wife if you don't first love your own body? From now on I want you to start admiring your body and thinking very loving thoughts about it. It is only as you come to love and highly value your body that love for your wife will be possible. Who would dare defend such folly? And yet that reasoning is exactly what is being used in pulpits all over America as modernist ministers zealously tell us that we will never be able to love others until we can first love ourselves.

#### **What do the false teachers really mean when they tell us to love ourselves?**

##### **Do they want us to think high, exaggerated thoughts about ourselves? What does the Bible say?**

That we should have a realistic opinion of ourselves and not think too highly of ourselves...

Romans 12:3 - For I say, through the grace given to me, to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God has dealt to each one a measure of faith.

##### **Or do they want us to think of ourselves as superior to others?**

The Scriptures say the opposite...

Philippians 2:3 - Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.

#### **Perhaps these gurus of self-esteem would have us to congratulate ourselves on our great insight and wisdom.**

The Bible tells us:

Isaiah 5:21 - Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight!

Actually they never really tell us specifically what they mean by their commandment to love ourselves. They just leave it up to us to enforce it in whatever way we can. For most, this means a futile attempt to pretend that they are beautiful and lovely, all the while knowing in their hearts that they most definitely are not.

#### **JESUS' DEATH AND OUR VALUE**

The other main argument given by the advocates of self-worth involves Jesus' death on the cross. "How can we doubt our value when we consider the cross," they say. "Since Jesus gave His life for us we must be worth a great deal."

##### **What do you think of this argument, did Jesus give His life because we are so valuable?**

- There is both truth and error in this line of reasoning. No one can deny that Christ's death on the cross emphatically declares that our God loves us and has shown a powerful interest in the human race.
- But shall we view the cross as a revelation of our intrinsic worth or of God's amazing grace?
  - I don't know about you, but I still believe in amazing grace that saved a "wretch" like me...  
 Shall we look at the cross and say, "Jesus died for me; how wonderful I must be?"  
 Shall we not rather say, "Jesus died for me; how wonderful He is!"

#### **The following image comes to mind:**

This reminds me of an illustration that Kathleen Carlisle shared with me which I have found true at our house...

We have a dog and three cats all of which live in heaven on earth. They are all very happy but the dog shows it much more than the cats. When we come home or feed her or take her somewhere, she is ecstatic. It is as if she is saying "my people are so good to me, they must be god!" Now the cats have a slightly different attitude. Clearly they recognize that everything we do must be in some way for them. It is as if they think, "my people are so good to me, I must be god!"

#### **Another image comes to mind:**

Imagine two teddy bears, one made of pure gold and the other of cloth. The gold bear has intrinsic value within itself. You can take it to any nation in the world and people would desire it. If you were to give it as a gift, there would be few persons on earth that would not eagerly accept it. The cloth bear, however, has no such intrinsic value. It is all worn, one eye is missing, and its stuffing has begun to come out. It is stained and smelly and has obviously seen better days. No matter where you take it or to whom you show it, no one has any interest in it at all. Just as you are about to throw it in the trash, a voice screams at you: "Don't you dare!" A four year old little boy comes up to you and with great indignation takes it out of your hands. "That's my teddy bear and I love him." Does the cloth bear have value? Yes and no. It has no intrinsic value, yet because it is loved, it is indeed valuable.

### **What makes people valuable?**

The great reformer Martin Luther said, "God does not love us because we are valuable; we are valuable because God loves us."

- Yes, the awesome and holy Creator of all things has set His love upon us, polluted by sin as we are, selfish to the core, and apart from God's grace possessing no good thing within ourselves.

### **How does our understanding of faith help us to understand how we should view our value as people?**

Our faith is not in ourselves or any other created thing, the most important, saving faith is in God Himself. Likewise, our value is in how God regards us, it is not in anything we are by ourselves.

### **How does having a wrong view of the source of our value limit our spiritual growth?**

- As long as our eyes are on ourselves, vainly trying to puff ourselves up in our thinking, we'll never know real faith or real power.
- Spiritual growth comes as we experience a relationship with the Lord. Being focused on ourselves limits that relationship experience.
- A greater understanding of the awesome holiness and majesty of God can change one's view of himself. Isaiah was no doubt one of the most upright men of his generation, and yet when God granted him a vision of His glorious throne, Isaiah's self-esteem plummeted rapidly, and all he could say was, *"Woe is me... I am a man of unclean lips and I live in the midst of a people of unclean lips, for my eyes have seen the King, the Lord of hosts"* (Isaiah 6:5).

### **Closing...**

One day we will all have that opportunity to stand before our King and Savior. At that day there will be no arrogant boasting of things accomplished or levels attained to, for we shall know of a truth that all the good that has ever been done in the earth has been His doing the powerful working of the One who said, *"I am the vine, you are the branches... Without Me you can do nothing"* (John 15:5).