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Is Self-Esteem Contrary to Christianity

By Johnny Kicklighter

The philosophy of self-esteem is probably the most influential doctrine to arrive on the scene in Christendom's recent history. At least in my lifetime, it has had as much affect, if not even more, on evangelical Christianity than the modern tongues movement that surfaced in the late 1960's. Not only has self-esteem psychology crept into every aspect of Biblical doctrine and practice but society as well. A Korean War era fighter pilot turned minister in the 1957 movie "Battle Hymn," was rebuked on the front steps of his church for preaching too harshly on man's condition, and not enough on love and forgiveness. Even Hollywood got into the act! Actually, the entire self-movement is perhaps the most single cause of the mainstream church losing the vision for preaching the cross of Christ. After all, if man's problems can be healed with positive self-esteem, and preaching the depravity of the human spirit hurts people's feelings, then it logically follows that our message must be changed.

If there is any doubt, review some of the sermons from the Puritan era and compare them to what we hear today. Here's a portion of Jonathan Edwards' famous sermon, "Sinners in the Hand of an Angry God" given by him on July 8, 1741 in Enfield, Connecticut:

"Your wickedness makes you as it were heavy as lead, and to tend downwards with great weight and pressure towards hell; and if God should let you go, you would immediately sink and swiftly descend and plunge into the bottomless gulf, and your healthy constitution, and your own care and prudence, and best contrivance, and all your righteousness, would have no more influence to uphold you and keep you out of hell, than a spider's web would have to stop a falling rock."

Not only does Edwards expose the utter ruin of man with colorful metaphors, he condemns man's "healthy constitution" which can only refer to one's lofty self-esteem.

How did we come so far so fast in losing our first love (Rev. 2:4)? Can theology and psychology be integrated? Psychology attempts to conform the Bible to its standard and states that man is innately good, whereas the Bible teaches man is inherently sinful and desperately wicked. Self-love theology taught by Christians is the result of the lack of a practical theology, or a failure to understand the implications of Biblical truth. Additionally, Christian psychologists who attempt to accommodate psychology theories with the written Word have compromised Biblical truth; not unlike what C.I. Schofield did with his famous "Gap Theory." Schofield attempted to dovetail recent scientific theories

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on evolution with scripture producing a "theistic evolution."

The most striking change in my understanding of this topic of self-esteem has been in the area of soteriology. A correct view of God in His relationship and dealings with man is vitally important when a sinner approaches the throne of Grace. Note Luke 18:13, "And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner." Man's failure to understand and see his wickedness in the presence of a Holy God is probably the single most cause of man's unwillingness to repent. The doctrine of self-love, self-esteem, self-image, and etc., has convinced man to reinforce his resolve to not confess his frailty and seek the righteousness of Christ.

Is it true that people really hate themselves? Actually they hate their behavior or the circumstances

that results from their bad behavior. Ezekiel 20:43, "There you will remember your conduct and all the actions by which you have defiled yourselves, and you will loathe yourselves for all the evil you have done." Actually Ephesians 5:29 says, "After all, no one ever hated his own body...." Counselors frequently have bad feelings. Many clients will tell the counselor they are suffering from low self-esteem. Frequently they have taken on a persona of victimhood to nourish themselves. They seek stroking because they assume they are loveable. In reality, many are suffering from guilt due to sin and want to feel better. The counselor instead of attempting to relieve pain should expose the sin and seek a confession. Galatians 3:24, "Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith." The pain itself can be as schoolmaster to bring one to repentance as Paul said in 2 Corinthians 7:8-9: "Even if I caused you sorrow by my letter, I do not regret it. Though I did regret it—I see that my letter hurt you, but only for a little while yet now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance."

Unfortunately, many within the Christian community seek to build a sinner's self-esteem by convincing them they have worth because man is made in the image of God. Indeed, the reason Christ died on the cross for you they say is because "you are so worthy." Not only is this dogma not found in history, it directly contradicts the doctrine of total depravity. Steele and Thomas in their book "Romans, An Interpretive Outline," define total depravity as:

"Because of the fall, man is unable of himself to savingly believe the gospel. The sinner is dead, blind, and deaf to the things of God; his heart is deceitful and desperately corrupt. His will is not free, it is in bondage to his evil nature; therefore, he will not—indeed he cannot—choose good over evil in the spiritual realm. Consequently, it takes much more than the Spirit's assistance to bring a sinner to Christ—it takes regeneration by which the Spirit makes the sinner alive and gives him a new nature. Faith is not something man contributes to salvation but is itself a part of God's gift of salvation—it is God's gift to the sinner, not the sinner's gift to God."

(Note Genesis 2:15-17, Romans 5:12, Psalm 51:5, 1 Corinthians 2:14, Romans 3:10-18, Jeremiah 17:9 John 6:44, and Ephesians 2:1-10 as supporting proof.) And what of man being made in God's image? John Piper says it well in 1998 when speaking of total depravity:

"In Romans 14:23 Paul says, "Whatever is not from faith is sin." Therefore, if all men are in total

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rebellion, everything they do is the product of rebellion and cannot be an honor to God, but only part of their sinful rebellion. If a king teaches his subjects how to fight well and then those subjects rebel against their king and use the very skill he taught them to resist him, then even those skills become evil. Thus man does many things which he can only do because he is created in the image of God and which in the service of God could be praised. But in the service of man's self-justifying rebellion, these very things are sinful."

Tune into any talk show regarding self-esteem and you will undoubtedly hear the reason why you feel bad. You have low self-esteem because you haven't forgiven yourself. The infamous Tanya Harding coveted the 1994 Olympic skating championship to the point where she hired some thugs to break Nancy Kerrigan's legs. Harding apologized at a press conference for the assault, but said her biggest problem was an inability to forgive herself. Where in scripture are we commanded to forgive ourselves? Not in Luke 17:3-4, "If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him. If he sins against you seven times in a day, and seven times comes back to you and says, 'I repent,' forgive him." The "theistic psychologists" have simply integrated the doctrine of forgiving oneself into Christianity.

Paul Vitz in his book, "Psychology As Religion: The Cult of Self-Worship," contend that psychology has not only become a religion, but a secular cult of self-worship and is contributing to the problems of everyday living by fostering selfishness and blame shifting. Jay Adams' in his book, "The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love, Self-Image," presents a clear scriptural basis for not only the errors of the movement, but offers a biblical alternative on how to evaluate ourselves. David Tyler's, "Jesus Christ Self-Denial Or Self-Esteem," reveals that the life of Jesus Christ and His teachings were an exact opposite of what the proponents of selfism would have us believe.

God has an abhorrence of a proud and haughty spirit. As spoken in Proverbs 16: 17-19: "The highway of the upright avoids evil; he who guards his way guards his life. Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud." The judgment of history may conclude that the self-love movement was more damning to people's souls than the heresy of Baptismal regeneration in years past. Time will tell.

Johnny Kicklighter is a counselor at

Gateway Biblical Counseling & Training Center

, a ministry of

Edgemont Bible Church

Methods Of Self-Esteem Improvement

By Holly Dodd

Many of us suffer from low self esteem and lack self confidence, you'll be happy to know that there are

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many methods for self esteem improvement.

The first question you should ask yourself when attempting to improve your self esteem is whether there are issues that need to be addressed with a professional counselor. This is particularly true if your low self esteem is driving you to abuse alcohol or other drugs and is interfering in your life in a major way. If so, you may need to speak with a therapist or counselor who specializes in self esteem issues.

If you want to raise your self esteem but are not having major self esteem problems, then a trip to the local library or book store may help. There are hundreds of self help books, self help groups, self help tapes, self help videos to choose from as self help is a particularly hot topic these days. You may even want to hire a personal coach. These tools will help you improve your self esteem dramatically if you put the advice and recommendations that you receive into action.

One of the real keys to improving self esteem is in taking action. Many people who suffer from low self esteem often get stuck in a rut which drives their self esteem even lower. To raise self esteem, you need to set goals for yourself and then take the necessary actions to meet these goals. Just taking continual action will move you closer towards goal attainment and stop you feeling as if you are worthless and at the mercy of others.

Pay close attention to how you talk. Negative self talk is a real self esteem killer. Make a habit of trading the words "I can't" to "I will" Having positive expectations will go along way towards increasing you self esteem.

And don't feel as if you're alone. There are thousands of people just like you that of people who suffer from low self esteem and need to improve how they look at themselves and the world around them. You are not alone and you can create the life that you dream of, you just need to start taking steps in the right direction. The sooner you start the sooner you can start enjoying your life as it was meant to be enjoyed.

Holly Dodd publishes a variety of websites. For more information on debt consolidation visit

<http://selfhelppersonalgrowth.info>

or

<http://www.blog.freeofferguide.com>



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