

A BIBLICAL VIEW OF SELF

"I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith."

...Romans 12:3

A friend who is a social worker asked this question several months ago, "Knowing what the Bible teaches about original sin and total depravity, how can I properly inspire the young men and women I deal with to cultivate a sense of self-worth and self-esteem?" This article is an attempt to answer that question.

We are all extremists. We seem to constantly swing from one extreme to the other, never able to stabilize our thoughts with a happy medium. This extremism may be seen in our views of ourselves. We naturally either overestimate ourselves or underestimate ourselves. A biblical view of self will avoid both these extremes.

Most of us have terribly inflated views of ourselves. We overestimate ourselves. We think far more highly of ourselves than we should. This over estimation of self, this inflation of ego, is what the Bible calls "pride". God hates it (Prov. 6:16-19). Pride always leads to destruction. It is written, "Pride goeth before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:18). "Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility" (Prov. 18:12). "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6).

Inflated egos are horribly wicked. Over estimating ourselves is wrong. However, the other extreme is just as dangerous. It is also wrong for us to underestimate ourselves. A total lack of self-worth and self-esteem is just as destructive as open pride. We call those who underestimate themselves "introverts". They do not honor God with faith. They have neither aim nor ambition in life. They do nothing in the service of God or men. They spend all their energies thinking about themselves and how bad things are for them. This self deprecation is frequently mistaken for humility. But it is not humility. It is just another form of pride.

The person who overestimates himself tries to do what God has not given him the ability to do. The person who underestimates himself will not even try to do what he is perfectly capable of doing. In both cases nothing is done for the glory of God and the welfare of men, no useful purpose is served. It is for this reason that Paul tells us we must form a proper view, a proper estimation of ourselves. A proper estimate of self is essential to a meaningful, happy, and useful life. A proper biblical view of self involves at least four things: abhorrence, appreciation, acquiescence, and ambition.

ABHORRENCE

A biblical view of self begins with abhorrence, an abhorrence of yourself. You have not seen yourself as you really are until you can honestly say with Job, "I have heard of thee (The holy Lord God) by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth thee. Wherefore I abhor

myself, and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:5-6). No one sees himself properly until he sees himself as God sees him. And the only way anyone sees himself as God does is when he sees himself in the light of God's glorious holiness and grace, in the light of Christ crucified, both guilty and justified, fallen and forgiven, ruined and redeemed. Then he abhors himself and bows to God in true repentance (Zech. 12:10). This is what David experienced after his sin in the matter of Uriah (Psa. 51:1-5). This is what Isaiah experienced when he saw the Lord in his redemptive glory (Isa. 6:1-8; 64:6).

Every believer judges himself and condemns himself, recognizing that in his flesh there is nothing good (Rom. 7:18). We acknowledge the sinfulness of our hearts, the sinfulness of our deeds, and the sinfulness of our personal righteousness. A biblical view of self begins with the abhorrence of self. But the believer's life is more than a life of constant, morbid self-abhorrence.

APPRECIATION

A biblical view of self involves appreciation too. I do not mean to suggest that we should pat ourselves on the back and appreciate what we are by nature or what we have made of ourselves. I mean that every believer should have an awesome awareness of and appreciation for what God has done for him in Christ.

You and I are nothing. We cannot do anything for or with ourselves that is truly good. But God has made us something and done much for us in Christ. Christ is everything. Every believer recognizes and rejoices in that fact. Christ is our wisdom, righteousness, sanctification, and redemption (I Cor. 1:30). He is the Alpha and the Omega, the Beginning and the Ending, the First and the Last, and everything between (Rev. 1:11). Truly, "Christ is all!" (Col. 3:11). God the Father has given him all pre-eminence (Col. 1:18). God the Spirit gives him all pre-eminence (John 16:13). And every believer gives him all pre-eminence (John 3:30).

Realizing that, if a child of God views himself properly in the light of Holy Scripture, he also realizes that he is a person of great value to God, a person upon whom God almighty places very great worth. The Lord God paid such an infinitely great price for his elect, redeemed them at such a great cost that there is nothing he will not give them or sacrifice for them (Rom. 8:32; Isa. 43:3-4). If you are a child of God, you are the object of his eternal love (Jer. 31:3), the purchase of his precious blood (I John 3:16), the apple of his eye (Zech. 2:8), and the delight of his heart (Zeph. 3:17). In yourself you are nothing but sin. But in Christ you are the delight of the triune God.

When a person discovers that God does not make duplicates, he discovers something of tremendous significance. God only makes originals. That means that there is something God almighty has purposed to say, reveal, and do in you that cannot be said, revealed, or done in anyone else!

In my flesh I am nothing. In Christ I am something. In myself I am insignificant. In Christ I am a child of God. In my own strength I can do nothing. In Christ I can do all things (Phil. 4:13). This is a glorious thought. Yet, it is an absolute reality. Christ lives in me, works through me, and makes himself known to others by me!

The fact is, believers have such a high and special standing before God that anything done to them or for them is considered by the Son of God as having been done to him (Matt. 25:34-40). Let us truly abhor ourselves because of the sin that is in us. Yet, let us truly appreciate what God by his grace has done for us in Christ.

ACQUIESCENCE

A biblical view of self also demands acquiescence. Many, especially those of us who believe the gospel of God's free and sovereign grace have difficulty grasping this, but there is a sense in which God requires us to love ourselves (Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:39). John Gill was exactly right when he wrote, "The law supposes that men should love themselves; otherwise they cannot love their neighbors." We are not to love ourselves in a sensual way, indulging ourselves in carnal lusts, pleasing ourselves rather than seeking to please God. But we are to love ourselves in a natural sense, being careful to protect life and limb, family and property. Certainly, we are to love ourselves in a spiritual sense, being concerned for our souls and our eternal salvation in Christ.

This is the requirement of the law. We are to love one another as we love ourselves. That means we are to seek our neighbor's temporal and eternal good. To love our neighbor is to do the very best we can for him and with him. That is our responsibility. But we cannot fulfill that responsibility if we do not love ourselves in the same way. A biblical view of self involves abhorrence, appreciation, and acquiescence. We must abhor our sin, appreciate what God has done for us, and love ourselves that we might love others.

AMBITION

A biblical view of self also involves ambition. "God has made us for a purpose, and we shall never be satisfied until that purpose is realized" (Stephen Olford). Our supreme purpose in life must be to find, follow, and finish the will of God in our lives (Acts 20:24). To do so is not only to find satisfaction and fulfillment, but also contentment and enjoyment. Idle, lazy, loafers never find satisfaction in life. Those people who live in such misery that they cannot cope with life are usually people who have no meaningful responsibilities in life, people who have nothing to do. They are never satisfied because their lives serve no useful purpose. Satisfaction and fulfillment comes only to those whose lives are driven with ambition, not carnal but spiritual ambition, ambition to know and win Christ (Phil. 3:7-14), ambition to do the will of God (Psa. 27:11; 86:11), ambition to glorify God in all things (I Cor. 10:31; Col. 3:23). Find out what the will of God is for you. Pursue it with all your heart, for the glory of God. If you do, you will live and die in contentment and peace (II Tim. 4:6-8).

This biblical view of self is not at all contrary to humility. It is the inevitable result of true humility. Humility is the honest recognition of what we are by nature, what we are by grace, and what our place is in the purpose and kingdom of God. God demands that we love him, love our neighbors, and love ourselves (Mark 12:30-31). That means that we must look upon ourselves with abhorrence because of our sin, appreciation because of God's grace, acquiescence because of what God has made us, and ambition to do the will of God and bring glory to our God. I say, through the grace given unto me, to every one who reads these lines, do not think of yourself more highly than you ought to think, but do think soberly, according

as God has dealt to you the measure of faith.

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