

## 'Self-Esteem'?

We Christians have a habit of taking something straight out of the world and baptising it into the name of Christianity. This has created the growth of a massive Christian 'subculture'. If worldly amusements are out, we have 'Christian television' and 'Christian radio'. (I have often turned the car radio on and thought I was tuned to a secular rock station before suddenly being told it was 'Rhema Christian radio'). If rock music is of the devil, how about 'Christian rock'. If senseless and bloody violence is out and such sports as wrestling are not Christian, then we instead have Christian groups like the *Power Team* - a group of professional wrestlers who packed auditoriums around the world to demonstrate that being 'plugged in' to Jesus was responsible for their success in breaking blocks of wood with their foreheads and other such (senseless?) feats. If occultic Witchcraft, magic and spiritism are forbidden, then we Christianise them and have C.S.Lewis's *The Lion, the Witch and Wardrobe* or Frank Peretti's tales of supernatural warfare among angels and demons in the mythical city of Ashton - after all, they are only 'make believe'? If *Alcoholics Anonymous* with its 'higher power' is not Christian, then we replace it with a 'Christian' ten step programme. If psychology is non Christian, being invented by three men who were God haters, then we simply invent 'Christian Psychology'!

In the second half of the 20th Century, with the increasing prominence of psychology, the 'self esteem' fad took off in the USA like an express train and has not stopped since. Like all non Christian fads, Christians took hold of it and agreed that many problems of behaviour and relationships were caused by a lack of 'self esteem'. The solution for life's problems was to develop a good 'self image'.

Yet this 'self esteem' fad was devoid in the lives and teachings of the great church leaders down through the running centuries. Revivalist Jonathan Edwards appeared not to have any view of 'self esteem': *'Often I have had very affecting views of my own sinfulness and vileness; very frequently to such a degree as to hold me in a kind of loud weeping...when I look into my heart and take a view of my wickedness, it looks like an abyss infinitely deeper than hell...'* And the great missionary William Carey's epitaph read: *'Born August 17, 1761. Died June 9, 1834. A wretched poor and helpless worm'*.

The Scriptures too are devoid of the idea of 'self esteem'. Rather, there is a mass of scriptures referring to the sinful and depraved heart of man. 'Self' is actually diametrically opposed to the message of the Gospel unless it is used in negative and sinful terms to explain the heart of man - the very reason why there is the Gospel. The epistles consistently write of Christian behaviour and fellowship with our brethren as being *outward* focused and not anything to do with *self*.

However, one scripture that is wrested from its moorings for support of 'self esteem' is Matthew 22:39: *'...Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself'*. But this love for our neighbour is a love of *equity* - *we owe to our neighbour what we might expect for ourselves* - *'And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise'*, (Lk.6:31). Any 'self-love' here is also in *spiritual* terms for our soul. It is a long way removed from the modern teaching of 'self-esteem'! The passage actually never commands us to love ourselves. The word '*love*' in Matthew 22 emphasises the

humbling serving love of Jesus Christ for rebellious sinners, not the 'self-esteem' of feeling good or liking oneself.

Our problem is not lack of 'self esteem'. Our problem is self deception. Listen to what Paul wrote!: *'...in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud...'*

Amazingly, *secular* experts have realised the falseness of 'self esteem'. In a column in the *US News & World Report* (May 18, 1998) John Leo wrote, *'The self esteem movement is one of the marvels of our time. It goes on and on, even though its assumptions are wrong and its basic premises have been discredited by a great deal of research'*.

A team of researchers published their findings in the January 2005 issue of *Scientific American*. Their research conclusively destroyed the self-esteem myth and demonstrated that the nation's obsession with self-esteem was never based on science in the first place and has little value in fostering academic progress or preventing undesirable behaviour. They found that *those with low self-esteem are not merely negative about themselves, they are negative about everything*. The team found that raising 'self-esteem' does not offer students much benefit. Some findings even suggest that artificially boosting self-esteem may lower subsequent performance. Despite all this research, like evolution, (another *theory*), the need for 'self esteem' is now accepted as fact!

The mission of the church is not to give people 'self-esteem'. The Gospel must address the very opposite in man - the sinful and depraved nature. The great evangelists of old pressed to make man feel as low in sin as possible before they ever offered them the esteem that is available in Christ.

Psychologists may accurately describe people who are depressed and observe patterns in social and personal history, but for the Christian any such observations must be run through the grid of scripture. That grid simply has no place for the world's current teaching on 'self-esteem'

Author John MacArthur writes: *'Never before, not even in the medieval church, have Christians been so obsessed with themselves. Self-esteem, self confidence, self this and self that have replaced talk of God's attributes. Ironically, it has created the opposite of its intentions. Without the knowledge of God in whose image we have been created and the grace which has made us the children of God, narcissism, or self-love, quickly evolves into depression'*. (P.169 '*Fools Gold*')

An entire industry of self-esteem enhancing seminars, conferences, books and programs means big business and big money. *Christians have bought into this culture*. But the idea that 'self-esteem' - feeling good about ourselves - is a pre-requisite to contentment, without reference to reality, character or behaviour - this is deception. The concept is just not found in scripture, which constantly directs the Christian to look outside of themselves to others. Nowhere in scripture is there self edifying or 'self esteem', but rather the phrase '*edify one another*' is all too common, (Rom.14:19; 1Thess 5:11; Eph.4:11,12).

The Christian finds satisfaction, not in a sense of self-worth, but in knowing the one Saviour and living God. The gospel makes it clear that the Christian's identity is found *in Christ* - not in the depraved or fleshly self.

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