

# **The Gospel of Self**

## **Self-Esteem, Self-Image, and Self-Love**

**Lynda Allison Doty**

*This article is presented to show the error of the non-biblical doctrines of self love and self esteem.*

*Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory;  
but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.  
Philippians 2:3*

ISSUES PERTAINING TO THE SELF have become big business today. Psychology teaches that our problems stem from low self-esteem; therefore, we are told, we must work on building it up, strive to feel good about ourselves. Psychology implores us to think more highly of ourselves, and banish the feelings of inferiority that keep us below our potential. Their battle cry is to love ourselves, to please ourselves, to be good to ourselves, because certainly we deserve it.

Once again, the world's way is not God's way. Paul instructed the Philippians in the matter of self-esteem, and he was very clear—esteem each other better than themselves. We get caught up in this thing about self-esteem and often lose our perspective. We feel inferior. We struggle to be what we are not, to feel what we are not supposed to feel.

The church today is increasingly embracing humanist tenets such as the necessity for self-love, self-worth, and self-esteem. Do we really want to be a part of the mainstream? Do we really wish to embrace the humanistic ideals lurking behind "Christian" psychology? Stand back for a minute and look where it is headed: we are being drawn into the one-world religion that will defy and deny God and all that He stands for. There has been a lengthy, insidious process of changing how we view ourselves and the world around us. Psychology has paved the way by revolutionizing our vocabulary, our values; it has effectively done away with repentance by transforming sin into "disease and dysfunction." The new language has infiltrated our schools, homes, and churches. From an article in U.S. News and World Report, "Does Psychotherapy Work?": "You may not have been in therapy, but you cannot escape its language"( May 24, 1993).

When we have the Holy Ghost, we have God almighty living inside of us. *He* is the One who is to be esteemed. When we keep our focus on the fact that He is the

One doing the work, and not us, we are liberated to do powerful things in His Name. When we realize it has absolutely nothing to do with our inflated self-esteem, we are able to rise like eagles into new power, new dimensions we never dared to dream of before! But the paradox is that the smaller we become, the bigger He becomes!

## **Self-Love**

Jesus said unto him, *Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets* (Matthew 22: 37-40).

Invariably when we get into discussions with Christian psychologists, they will cite this scripture as a biblical basis for loving oneself. They will tell us that we have to work at loving ourselves before we can love anyone else. How, they reason, can we give others what we don't have ourselves?

I don't fault these people, because I used to believe the same way. But over time, I have come to realize that, first of all, there are only two commandments here: Love God. Love your neighbor. There is no third commandment saying we must love ourselves. What Jesus is telling us in that verse is that sinner already loves himself, so he needs to love his neighbor at least that much. We already love ourselves so much all we can think about is *our* pain, *our* healing, *our* self, even *our* "inferiority-complex."

Case example: a young client I'll call Sue was abused as a child. What one observes by being around Sue, is that all she can really think about is Sue. People tend to feel sorry for her because of her past, and then feel obligated to make her feel better. The deception here is that people so readily believe these hurting people do not love themselves, and that this is where their problem lies. But is it—really? Our job is not to offer sympathy, which encourages self-pity. Our job is to help the hurting person make their way to truth.

One day a group of us went out to eat. Sue had her walls up that day, copping an attitude. She decided she was either too wounded or too angry to eat, who knows which one. She sat there at the table with no food, and the rest of the party felt bad, eating in front of her and wondering what was wrong. They would try to coax her to eat, but she just continued to sit there looking wounded and angry. Others wondered, Did I do something wrong? If Sue had loved us as Christ directed, and as much as she loved herself, she would have been thinking more of our welfare and less of her own. What she should have done was not go with the group in the first place, but head off to an altar somewhere and hash things out with God.

“Humanistic psychology teaches that man’s basic problem is not that he has a sin nature (rooted in self-love) or that he sins naturally and purposely, but rather that he has low self-esteem, stemming from a massive, others-induced inferiority complex, which in turn leads him to make ‘wrong choices’ in his search for love and self-worth. Under the influence of ‘Christian’ psychology, the emphasis continues to shift from man’s sin to his ‘sickness,’ from sinful man to pathological man. The obvious cure for such a person is to make him feel better about himself” (Owen, page 77).

Another example: one young woman stayed in our home as my husband and I counseled with her. One day, she packed her bags and sneaked away as though she were being held prisoner. We had no clue that anything was wrong, but all the while, she was sitting back judging us through her own distorted thinking. While pretending all was well, she judged my heart, my marriage, my ministry, my life. She watched me through the eyes of self...her distorted interpretation of how everything should be.

She later told me. “You should have been sensitive to me, you knew my feelings were still tender.” Self. She could only think of self, and her own feelings. Somehow, we have to help lift these people out of their pits of self-pity, and self-consciousness. If we can just help them look up and out, get their minds on Someone outside of themselves! For only God can change a heart.

The closer we get to God, the more we sense our own unworthiness, rottenness. The closer you hold something to the light, the better your vision, and the more imperfections you can see. We become so small and spotted, and yet—oh! How full of joy we are, oh what a fellowship! When we begin to really seek the face of God and learn Who He is, we can’t help but feel our own lack of worth—and that is where the joy and the strength lie!

## **Self-Esteem**

And yet today we are taught to seek our joy and strength in our own self-worth. We strive to feel worthy, and then wonder why we are bordering on despair. We lift ourselves up, only to fall into depression. Most of what we call inferiority is not that at all. It is self-focus. Comparing ourselves to others! I was dreadfully shy in high school, but no one ever pointed me to the corner seminar on self-esteem. I was told to forget myself and think of the others. And sure enough—it worked. But like Peter walking on the water, when I put my focus back onto myself, I would again plunge into the pain of shyness.

“If ever there was a word that could cast a spell of enchantment over the eyes of the evangelical community, self-esteem is that word. Perhaps it was inevitable, considering ‘Christian’ psychology’s preoccupation with pathological man. The result is that preoccupation with self-esteem has become the norm for far too

many Christians...most Christian psychologists are one with most secular psychologists in embracing the idea that a person's opinion of himself... determines how well that person will function... and most Christian psychologists accept, as do most secular psychologists, the premise that low self-esteem is the cause of most human behavioral problems" (Owen, p. 49).

So often in our quest for things that please self, we seek those things outside the will of God for us. Perhaps you want to be like the most popular girl at school? What you might need to realize is if that's what God wanted, He would have made you that girl instead of who we are. Perhaps you long for a ministry like Brother Bobby's, and wish God had given that to *you*, instead. But it is not your lot in life; it does not mean anything is wrong with you, it does not mean you have poor self-esteem. It simply means it is not the will of God for *you*. When we yearn to be one thing and God has something else in mind, it is so easy to feel like failures and inferior to everyone else.

The following is adapted from an article by Martin and Deidre Bobgan, "Self-Esteem for Christians," from the website: [www.psychoheresy-awareness.org](http://www.psychoheresy-awareness.org)

### **Self-Esteem for Christians?**

The self-esteem movement has its most recent roots in clinical psychology, namely in the personality theories of such men as William James, Alfred Adler, Erich Fromm, Abraham Maslow, and Carl Rogers. It became further popularized by their many followers. Nevertheless, the roots of the self-esteem movement reach further back into human history. It actually began in the third chapter of Genesis. Initially Adam and Eve were God-conscious rather than self-conscious. Adam realized that Eve was bone of his bone and flesh of his flesh, but he was not self-aware in the same sense that his descendants would be. Self was not the issue until the Fall.

### **Sinful Self**

When confronted with their disobedience, Adam and Eve answered with the first example of self-justification. First Adam blamed God, and then Eve, and then Eve blamed the serpent. The fruit of the knowledge of good and evil spawned the sinful self with all of its self-love, self-esteem, self-acceptance, self-justification, self-righteousness, self-actualization, self-denigration, self-pity and other forms of self-focus and self-centeredness.

Religious incantations for self-worth, self-love, and self-acceptance ooze out of the TV tube, drift across radio waves, and entice through advertising. From the cradle to the grave, self-promoters promise to cure all of society's ills through

doses of self-esteem, self-worth, self-acceptance, and self-love. “You just need to love and accept yourself the way you are. You just need to forgive yourself.”

## **Christian Response to the World**

Even though the Bible does not teach self-love, self-esteem, self-worth, or self-actualization as virtues, helps, or goals, a vast number of present-day Christians have been deceived by the self-teachings of humanistic psychology. Not only do they not resist the tidal wave of selfism; they are riding the crest of self-esteem, self-acceptance, and self-love. One can hardly tell the difference between the Christian and the non-Christian in the area of the self.

Through slogans, one-liners, and twisted Scripture, many Christians jump on the existential bandwagon of humanistic psychology and set up their own cheering section. Thus, any criticism voiced against the teachings of self-worth, self-love, and self-esteem is regarded as ipso facto proof that the speaker wants people to be miserable. (How many times have the man and woman of God been accused of this, because they preach and teach the Word and prayer and ministry of the Holy Spirit?) Moreover, any criticism against the self-esteem movement is seen as dangerous to society, since self-esteem is considered to be the panacea for its ills. Too many Christians have joined forces against what they and the secularists perceive to be the formidable enemy—low self-esteem.

The Bobgans go on to state: “Worse than the continuance of self-esteem teachings in the world is the faith that Christians continue to place in self-esteem and self-worth teachings. Thus, the secular self-esteem movement is not a frontal attack against the Bible with the battle-lines clearly displayed. Instead it is skillfully subversive and is truly the work, not of flesh and blood, but of principalities, powers, the rulers of darkness of this world, and spiritual wickedness in high places, just as delineated by Paul near the end of Ephesians. The sad thing is that many Christians are not alert to the dangers. More than we can number are being subtly deceived into another gospel: the gospel of self.”

For further reading: Lynda Allison Doty, *Apostolic Counseling*; J. R. Ensey, *The Couch and the Cross*; Martin and Deidre Bobgan, “Self-Esteem for Christians, Parts One and Two,” from the website: [www.psychoheresy-awareness.org](http://www.psychoheresy-awareness.org); Jim Owen, *Christian Psychology's War on God's Word*.