

Self-Esteem

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Bill Flatt's book, *Restoring My Soul* has some interesting and helpful information about "self-esteem." He defines it by saying, "It is how you feel about being you, how you feel about being alive. It results from an evaluation of your self-image, how you feel about the way you see yourself. It is influenced by the distance of the gap between your self-image and your ideal image," p. 106.

It's unfortunate that so many in our society determine self-esteem by good looks, intelligence, money, position, and athleticism. Often when one does not measure-up in those areas, one's self-esteem drops. The standard for good self-esteem according to the world is far different from God's standard for self-esteem. We ought to have good self-esteem because we are made in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). That is the greatest reason for each to have good self-esteem. Good self-esteem is not determined by the color of our skin, nor where we live, nor how much money we have in the bank, nor those other standards set by the world.

Even though all were made in the image of God, many people still struggle with low self-esteem. Often it manifests itself by feeling guilty, or being overly sensitive, or being hypercritical. Often one covers his low self-esteem by being shy, or being the class-clown, or the opposite extreme of manifesting an arrogant attitude. It may manifest itself by failing to take responsibility for one's actions, but always blaming others. It even manifests itself through various kinds of addictions. Flatt says that it is often connected with distress, depression, preoccupation with self, fatigue, chronic health problems, and negative attitudes toward self and others, page 106.

Good Self-Esteem Versus Pride

Even though God expects us to have confidence through our self-esteem, there is just a fine line between good self-esteem and manifesting arrogance and pride. The apostle Paul wrote in several passages about the attitude one ought to have about himself. ***"For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith"*** Romans 12:3. ***"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others"*** Philippians 2:3-4. ***"For if anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself"*** Galatians 6:3.

It seems that the difference between having good self-esteem and being arrogant is where one's confidence lies. If confidence is thought to be through the person's own ability, that is arrogance; if one's confidence is in God, it is good self-esteem. When Paul was talking about his financial condition he said, ***"I can do all things through Him who strengthens me,"*** Philippians 4:13. Even though it was brethren who furnished his material goods, he recognized that it was God who enabled him to do all things. When he spoke about our battle against opposition he said, ***"What then shall we***

say to these things? If God is for us, who is against us? He who did not spare his own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" Romans 8:31-32. Again, he stresses that it is God who enables us to win the victory. Good self-esteem realizes that God is the source of one's confidence, not one's own abilities.

Humility and Low Self-Esteem

When is giving in to another person humility and when is it a sign of low self-esteem? God expects us to be humble and to acknowledge the greatness of the other person (Philippians 2:3-4). Often those who have low self-esteem will not accept a challenge and will always give in to the other person. As we have seen above, good self-esteem is when one has confidence that God can use him to accomplish a task. Poor self-esteem is when one does not have the confidence that God can accomplish a task through him. When one will not accept a challenge, but always giving in to the other person does not reflect humility, but poor self-esteem. Biblical humility is not low self-esteem, but rather it is a willingness to submit to another person, even though the one submitting realizes he/she has the ability to accomplish the task at hand.

Too Much Emphasis on Good Self-Esteem

Although each of us needs to have good self-esteem many in society have taken that too far, to the point that we should not do anything to damage anyone's self-esteem. We see this in youth sports programs. Everyone gets a trophy whether his team won all their games or lost all their games. I've read that some school districts do not allow teachers to use red ink to make corrections on students' papers because it may damage their self-esteem. We have seen it in the school districts passing students to the next grade even though the student really did not do the work required to be promoted. The Bible does not teach that concept. Strength can come from failure. One may learn by failing than by winning, especially in the realm of sports events.

Conclusion

God wants us to have good self-esteem, but that simply means that one has confidence that he/she can accomplish a task. Let's remember that good self-esteem is confidence in God, not confidence in self. Let's realize that we are valuable, not because of what we can accomplish, but because we are made in the image of God and He loved us enough to send Jesus to die for us. We are valuable and because we are valuable, we should think highly of ourselves. That is the proper kind of good self-esteem.