**Self-Esteem**

**(Too Much of the Wrong Kind)**

In our previous study, Self-Esteem (Not Enough of the Right Kind), we noted that humility is vital if we want to be pleasing to God, but that humility is not self-loathing and paralyzing fear. A humble servant of God will recognize that the Father values them highly, that they can be rid of the guilt of sin by His grace, that He shows them a better way to live and that they can have confidence through the strength Christ supplies. But we all know that there are those around us who are bursting with “self-esteem” that manifests itself as pride and selfishness. This kind of self-love can be as sinful and destructive as self-hatred.

**Rebels.** I met a girl during my college days who, I was appalled to discover, treated her own mother with such contempt that I would have been embarrassed to show my neighbor’s dog. I would have felt more pity for the mother were it not for the fact that she had helped create the little monster. Apparently she had been careful to protect her daughter’s precious self-esteem but had failed to teach her that there is a structure of honor, respect and obedience that is divinely decreed. God has spoken very plainly regarding obedience to parents (Ephesians 6:1), civil government (Romans 13:1), bosses (Titus 2:9) and of course, to God Himself (1 Corinthians 7:19). Lots of folks bristle at the thought of being told what to do, and pride is often at the heart of their problem.

**“I’m thankful I’m better than that guy!”** That’s basically what the Pharisee prayed in Luke 18:11-12! He thought so highly of himself, he failed to realize that he was a sinner before God and was in dire need of His mercy and forgiveness. Within sight of the Pharisee was a tax collector beating his breast and saying, “God, be merciful to me, the sinner!” In fact, it was in this context that Jesus said, “everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.” The Pharisee just didn’t get it. The great creator of the universe girded Himself with a towel, got on His knees and washed the feet of His disciples to teach us a lesson: “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). A person who is full of himself will struggle to get on his knees to serve someone else.

**The Self-Made Man Syndrome.** Nothing stirs the American soul like a good rags-to-riches story. Men like John D. Rockefeller, Frederick Douglass and Sam Walton have inspired us with their vision, tenacity and work ethics. While their drive and hard work are to be commended, no one should ever make the monumental mistake of assuming they deserve all the credit for their successes. There are far too many circumstances in the life of every person that are totally outside of his or her control. Whether or not a person is willing to acknowledge it, the God who made the world is the One who “gives to all people life and breath and all things” (Acts 17:25). It is in Him that we “live and move and exist” (v. 28). Even starting with “rags”, an individual has been given intelligence, physical capabilities and opportunities not to mention the inexplicable providence of God along the way. James said that the person who fails to acknowledge the hand of God in their affairs is boasting in his arrogance, and such boasting is evil (James 4:16). The person who exalts himself will eventually be humbled.

The right kind of self-esteem is a good thing. We should value ourselves because God does. We can bear to look in the mirror, not because we have never failed but because God has rendered us guiltless through the sacrifice of His Son. We can strive to lead lives that are worthy of His love, confident that Jesus will give us the strength to accomplish everything He expects of us. But underlying all this healthy self-respect is the humble recognition of our unworthiness before God and our responsibilities toward one another. That kind of self-esteem is a true blessing from the Lord.

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