

TEN AREAS OF SELF ESTEEM IN THE SCRIPTURES

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Biblical self esteem consists in seeing ourselves as God sees us, and accepting ourselves as God accepts us. This is founded on the humble acknowledgment that God is responsible for every positive attribute we possess. "Know that the Lord is God. It is He who has made us" (Psalm 100:3). See 1 Corinthians 4:7. This foundation enables us to enjoy and use every good quality, without a trace of pride or false humility, because God receives the glory. A biblical perspective on our self esteem enables us to see ourselves realistically and accept ourselves as we are, both in our human condition and as we are in Christ--a new creation.

Self esteem includes many specific areas. Ten key areas are discussed here from a biblical perspective. The first five areas have been especially distorted by western values. We struggle with self esteem to the degree that we accept society's values rather than God's in these areas. See Romans 12:3, Ephesians 2:10 and 2 Corinthians 10:12.

1. Appearance

"You knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well" (Psalm 139:13-15). See Psalm 119:73. "...man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). God values the inner beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit over physical attractiveness. See 1 Peter 3:3,4 and Proverbs 31:30.

2. Competence

"Not that we are competent in ourselves to claim anything for ourselves, but our competence comes from God" (2 Corinthians 3:5). See Philippians 4:13 and Exodus 31:3. God gives true competence as we abide in Christ. See John 15:4,5. God values yieldedness above competence. See Exodus 4:10-14 and John 15:9,10.

3. Intelligence

God made each of us with sufficient intelligence to accomplish His purposes through us. "Yet, O Lord, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand" (Isaiah 64:8). Mark 12:30 commands us to love God with all our mind. It is difficult to love him with a mind which we reject as created inferior by Him.

God does not value man's intelligence when it is exalted apart from him. "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise; the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate" (1 Corinthians 1:19). God values wisdom, knowledge, insight, and understanding above intelligence. And he gives these to us as we seek and ask. See Proverbs 2:2-6 and James 1:5.

4. Personality

God is responsible for the basic foundation of our personality, and to reject it is to reject His creative ability. "Woe to him who quarrels with his Maker. Does the clay say to the potter, 'What are you making?'" (Isaiah 45:9).

Paul readily acknowledges weaknesses in his personality. "I came to you in weakness and fear, and with much trembling. My message and my preaching were not with wise and persuasive words, but with a demonstration of the Spirit's power" (1 Corinthians 2:3,4). "I am unskilled in speaking" (2 Corinthians 11:6). Even though Paul could admit personality problems, he didn't reject himself because of them. God values the fruit of the Spirit in our lives above personality. And as each fruit becomes evident, our personality becomes more Christlike.

5. Success

God's view of success contradicts the world's view. In Philippians 3:4-6 Paul listed his successes and then counted them as rubbish in order to gain Christ. God promises two kinds of success through Christ: 1) Unconditional success, based solely on Christ's work. See 2 Corinthians 2:14 and Romans 8:37. 2) Conditional success, based both on Christ's work and on conditions which we must fulfill, e.g. meditation on the Word and obedience (Josh. 1:8, Psalm 1:2,3); and abiding in Christ (John 15:4,5). God values faithfulness above success (in the world's terms). See Luke 16:10 and Revelation 2:10.

6. Unconditional Worth

As God's beloved children, we are of inestimable worth to Him on an unconditional basis (Ephesians 5:1, 1 John 3:1,2). We were "bought at a [very high] price" (1 Corinthians 6:20), "chosen" (Ephesians 1:4), a "dwelling place in which God lives" (Ephesians 2:22), and much, much more. In fact, more than 200 descriptions of us in the New Testament attest to our unconditional worth because of Christ's work. Let's not deny his grace by giving in to untrue feelings of worthlessness.

7. Self-Forgiveness

To forgive ourselves frees us to accept God's forgiveness, to accept ourselves as he does, and it affirms the sufficiency of Christ's blood. "In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God's grace" (Ephesians 1:7). Lack of self-forgiveness not only destroys healthy self esteem. It denies the power and effectiveness of God's grace. See Psalm 103:12,13, Romans 8:1.

8. Acceptance of Weakness

Scripture never commands us to be critical of our weaknesses. In fact, we have a High Priest who sympathizes with our weaknesses (Heb. 4:15). Yet most of us can't tolerate weakness. and so we can't accept ourselves as God does, with our weaknesses. The Lord said to Paul, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Paul's healthy response was, "Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses... For when I am weak, then I am strong" (2 Corinthians 12:9,10). This attitude centers our thoughts on Christ rather than on self, enabling his power to flow through our weaknesses. See 1 Corinthians 1:25-31.

9. Self-Love

God expects us to love ourselves (as He does), with agape. The only negative reference to selflove in Scripture is 2 Timothy 3:2, where philautos means to be selfish or self-centered. God's view is, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39); "He who gets wisdom loves himself" (Proverbs 19:8); "He who loves his own wife loves himself" (Ephesians 5:28). To love ourselves in a biblical way is to seek the ultimate, eternal good for ourselves, and this motivates us to "seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matthew 6:33).

10. Freedom from Guilt

Guilt can be Satan's "flaming arrows" sent to wound our sense of self esteem. But God has already dealt with all our guilt; we only need to appropriate His solution for it. To fail to do so is to fall into Satan's hands. See the handout, "Biblical Concepts for Conquering Guilt."

True guilt is resolved only through Christ's blood, according to 1 John 1:7,9. False guilt (feeling guilty when we aren't) is common among Christians. But it has no legitimate place in the Christian life, for in Christ we are described as holy, blameless, beyond reproach, consecrated, reconciled, righteous, justified, and more. Study, claim, and meditate on Colossians 1:22 and 3:12; Ephesians 1:4; John 17:19; Romans 5:9,10,19 and Romans 8:1,30. Self-condemnation not only destroys healthy self esteem; it places personal feelings

and judgments above God's own testimony to the effective sacrifice of his Son. Meditate on 2 Corinthians 5:21.

Summary

Healthy perspective on self esteem depends on heart-level integration of God's Word, which corrects distorted cultural values and internal judgments that destroy a biblical sense of our value in God's sight. We are not worthy, but we are of great worth. God has said so much in his Word about our worth to him that it must be very important to him that we integrate this truth into our hearts. Let us consciously work on growing in our understanding and acceptance of who we are, as his creation and beloved children.

For a discussion of the legitimacy of discussing self esteem see "A Rationale for Discussing Self Esteem." Other reprints on this topic include, "Growing in Self Esteem," "Who are We, Anyway?" "Ten Commands for Biblical Self Esteem," "Ten Areas of Self Esteem in the Scriptures," and "Biblical Concepts for Conquering Guilt."