

The Benefits of Being A Christian

(7) A NEW SELF-IMAGE: A SENSE OF PERSONAL WORTH

Introduction

A. Along with other important attitude changes when one becomes a Christian, there is a refreshing change in the attitude a person is able to have about himself.

B. The Christian's new identity (who he is) is the basis of a new self-image (how he sees himself).

C. In this lesson, we will look for an appreciation of this new view of ourselves.

I. THE NEED FOR A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT OURSELVES

A. Low self-esteem is a problem of epidemic proportions.

1. "Life is one long struggle to think well of ourselves."

2. The need to be appreciated — by self as well as others — is deeply embedded in human nature.

3. Millions are unable to "live with themselves," ridden with fears of insecurity, inferiority, unacceptability, or even worthlessness.

4. Depression and suicide are frighteningly common.

B. Low self-esteem multiplies its own agony.

1. "When a man finds no repose in himself, it is vain for him to seek it elsewhere" (French proverb).

2. When we are at odds with self, we are usually at odds with others.

a. "Our tendency to major on the negatives in others is often the offensive odor from painful, perhaps undetected abscesses of our own feelings of inferiority and self-hate" (Ruth Myers).

b. Putting others down because we are down on ourselves only causes others to think less of us — which, in turn, destroys our self-esteem even further.

3. Our frustration with external circumstances is often the result of frustration with ourselves.

a. The man who can't stand himself can't stand much else.

b. "A poor workman always finds fault with his tools."

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4. Humanistic psychiatry offers only two basic solutions to this agonizing problem, both of which are inadequate:

a. We are advised to accept self "as is."

b. Or we are advised to make stronger human efforts to improve self.

II. THE POSSIBILITY OF A NEW WAY OF LOOKING AT OURSELVES

A. How God looks at the Christian.

1. "True value" versus "apparent worth."

a. Whatever God's judgment of a person might be, we can be sure it is based upon real values, not merely external appearances.

b. "The Lord said to Samuel, 'Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have refused him. For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart'" (1 Sam. 16:7).

1) Jesus said, "Do not judge according to appearance, but judge with righteous judgment" (Jn. 7:24).

2) Paul wrote to the Corinthians, "For we do not commend ourselves to you, but give you opportunity to glory on our behalf, that you may have something to answer those who glory in appearance and not in heart" (2 Cor. 5:12).

c. "All that is gold does not glitter; not all those that wander are lost" (Tolkien).

d. God objectively and realistically sees both strengths and weaknesses, successes and failures.

2. God's concern for the individual - Mt. 10:29-31. Cf. Lk. 15:4-7; 1 Pt. 5:7; etc.

3. Why the individual Christian is important to God.

a. Because of who he is.

1) We are made "in the image of God" (Gen. 1:26,27).

a) "Look at the birds of the air, for they neither sow nor reap nor gather into barns; yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not of more value than they?" (Mt. 6:26).

b) "For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mk. 8:36,37).

2) As a human being — a creature in God's image — each individual has inherent value as a person: a unique personality, rational thought, a moral faculty, a spiritual nature, an eternal soul, etc.

b. Because of what he cost.

1) Each human being, whether a Christian or not, has inherent worth as a person in God's image.

2) But the Christian is more than just a human being: he has been "purchased" in love by God at the cost of His own Son's blood - Jn. 3:16; Ac. 20:28. Cf. 1 Pt. 1:18,19; 1 Jn. 4:9-11.

a) Though this blessing is potentially available to all men, it is only the Christian who actually enjoys this unique relationship to God - 1 Pt. 2:9. Cf. 1 Tim. 4:10.

b) The Christian, therefore, is special and distinctive to God — dedicated and set apart especially as the valued possession of God - 1 Cor. 6:20.

3) In Christ, no person is "inferior" in status before God - Gal. 3:26-28. Cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-27.

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c. Because of what he can become.

1) God is concerned not only with what we have been, but with what we can be in the future - e.g. Jn. 8:11. Cf. 2 Cor. 3:18; 4:17; 1 Jn. 3:2.

2) Even God's discipline is evidence of His fatherly concern for our potential - Hb. 12:7,8.

B. How the Christian can look at himself.

1. The questions Who am I? and What am I worth? are nearly impossible to answer except in relationship to someone else.

2. The Christian can answer these questions in the context of his relationship to God!

3. The Christian can begin to see himself as God sees him: in other words, to think "soberly" about himself, neither over-valuing nor under-valuing himself - Rom. 12:3.

4. The results are:

a. A sense of personal worth and value.

b. A sense of personal dignity, self-respect, and honor.

c. A sense of wholeness and well-being.

d. A healthy ego.

5. Whether worth is calculated in terms of what one has, what one does, or what one is, the Christian can see that his worth is more than what he has or has not been able to make of himself by mere human efforts. Cf. Jer. 9:23,24.

a. "The self-made man is usually a horrible example of unskilled labor!"

b. We can learn much from Paul's self-image - 1 Cor. 15:9,10. Cf. 2 Cor. 3:4,5; Phil.

3:8-11; 1 Tim. 1:15,16; etc.

6. Possible misconceptions.

a. Misunderstandings about “greatness” in spiritual matters - Mk. 9:33-35; 2 Cor. 10:12,17,18.

b. Misunderstandings about “humility.”

1) Humility is not the belittling of self, masochism — self-effacement is not the same as self-“defacement.”

2) Humility is not an excuse from work, involvement.

a) “I can’t” is often a “humble” cover-up for “I don’t want to.”

b) False humility is a “nice” way of shifting work off onto the shoulders of others.

3) Humility is not fishing for compliments, a roundabout way of exalting self.

c. Misunderstandings about “righteousness.”

1) Passages like Isa. 64:6 (“We are all like an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are like filthy rags”) do not mean that it is impossible to please God.

2) In this life, it is not possible to be perfect, but it is possible to be mature: “Let us, as many as are mature, have this mind” (Phil. 3:15). Cf. Col. 1:9,10; 1 Thess. 4:1; 1 Jn. 3:22.

3) Without faith it is impossible to please God, but with faith it is possible to please Him - Hb. 11:5,6.

d. Misunderstandings about “confidence.”

1) Jesus rebuked those “who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others” (Lk. 18:9-14).

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2) A confident sense of personal worth does not involve pride, arrogance, self-righteousness, or competition.

Conclusion

A. One of the most wonderful things about life in Christ is that we can not only be at peace with God and our fellow man, but also with ourselves!

B. Conversely, a good self-image improves our thinking about God and our fellow man.

1. “‘You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ On these two commandments hang all the Law and the Prophets” (Mt. 22:37-40).

2. When we are able to cease looking at ourselves “according to the flesh,” we will be able to do the same with other people: “Therefore, from now on, we regard no one according to the flesh. Even though we have known Christ according to the flesh, yet now we know Him thus no longer” (2 Cor. 5:16).

C. Let us remember that true self-respect comes from the doing of duty.

1. “How can a man come to know himself? Never by thinking, but by doing. Try to do your duty, and you will know at once what you are worth” (Goethe).

2. “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (Eccl. 12:13).

D. Let us, each day, respond anew with humility, gratitude, and confidence to the love of God which has imparted to us the sense of being valuable to our Creator!