

The Quarterly Journal



THE NEWSLETTER PUBLICATION OF PERSONAL FREEDOM OUTREACH

VOL. 24, NO. 1

JANUARY-MARCH 2004

EDITOR: KEITH A. MORSE

The Gospel of Self-Esteem

Are We Really Better Than We Think?

by David M. Tyler

Archie, a bi-vocational pastor, sought counseling. At the first session, he gave a synopsis of his problem:

Archie said his whole life had been one problem after another. His parents divorced when he was 10 years old. His father verbally abused both him and his mother. He never had many friends in school and felt lonely. Archie thought things would get better after he got married, but said things have not changed very much. Unfortunately, Archie said, he and his wife have been having marital problems for the past six years. Archie maintained he has always felt inferior. He had no self-esteem. He asked how he could expect anyone to love him if he didn't love himself. Archie said he needed to learn to love himself so he could have normal relationships and a happy life.

Archie's account said a lot about what he believes regarding the nature of man. Archie's words convey the belief that:

- Self-esteem is a vital element of human personality.
- Self-esteem is a feeling and not a thought process.



- Self-love is a prerequisite to being loved by others and loving others, including God.

- A person must fix his poor self-image.

Archie and his wife, Edith, serve the Lord at a nearby Baptist church. They met while they were attending a Bible college in the Midwest. Archie believes in the inerrancy of God's Word and is very orthodox when it comes to his preaching and teaching ministry. However, when it comes to solving life's problems, Archie is very unorthodox.

Archie is like many believers who have no practical or "everyday" theology. Archie has taught others the doctrines of sin, salvation, and the connection between faith and works. He has preached at Bible conferences and revival meetings. Unfortunately,

(continues on page 17)

- Being mistreated by others can cause a person's self-image to deteriorate and/or not develop properly.

Inside this Issue:

BLOWN TO SMITHEREENS!	PAGE 2
THE CLAIMS AND CONFUSION OF R.T. KENDALL	PAGE 4
BENNY HINN: HOW GREAT THOU AREN'T	PAGE 5

the great doctrines of the Christian faith that Archie knows so well are not relevant and practical to him when it comes to solving the problems of everyday living. Archie's theology tells him that Jesus died and rose, that faith without works is dead, and that God answers prayer, but it doesn't tell him how to counsel people who are depressed or fearful. Like many Christians today, Archie looks for answers outside of the Scripture. He looks to psychology for instruction and help. Psychology tells Archie he needs to love himself.

Psychology has exerted a powerful influence on Archie's thinking about the Bible and the work of Jesus Christ. Archie believes the Scriptures are inadequate and not sufficient to help him meet his deepest problems or "emotional needs." Like so many in the Church today, he believes the lie that there exists outside of Scripture, wisdom about man's nature. Archie believes that the Wonderful Counselor didn't tell him everything he needs to know and, therefore, God worked through unbelievers such as Sigmund Freud and Carl Rogers to fill in the blanks.

While many Christians view psychology with respect and admiration, more secular psychologists and psychiatrists are voicing their lack of confidence in psychology's claims, therapies, and scientific status. The titles of their books are revealing. For example, *Manufacturing Victims: What the Psychology Industry is Doing To People* by Tana Dineen; *Freudian Fraud: The Malignant Effect of Freud's Theory on American Thought and Culture* and *The Death of Psychiatry* by E. Fuller Torry; *The Myth of Mental Illness* and *The Myth of Psychotherapy* by Thomas Szasz; and *Toxic Psychiatry* by Peter Breggin. The list goes on.

In his first letter to Timothy, Paul tells his student to confront certain men within the Church who are teaching "strange doctrines" (1:3). What Paul had anticipated in Acts 20 when he wrote, "I know after my

departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock," had happened. Paul describes their teachings as "strange doctrines ... myths ... speculations" (1:3-4) that do not further the Gospel and help people. Paul warns Timothy that these people want to be teachers, but "do not understand either what they are saying or the matters about which they make confident assertion" (1:7). While these people confidently assert themselves as teachers and experts on matters pertaining to God's Word, Paul says they do not know what they are talking about.

There are all kinds of strange doctrines, myths, and speculations in counseling. Sigmund Freud's doctrines of the Id, Ego, and Super-ego are very strange. Alfred Adler's speculative theory of "striving for superiority," Carl Rogers' "ideal self," and Christian psychologist Larry Crabb's theory of the "hollow core" are unusual to say the least.

Many people who proclaim they are experts and qualified to teach on matters pertaining to behavior, do not know what they are talking about. Paul said these people were not using the Scriptures correctly or "lawfully" (1:8). They were not accurately handling God's Word (2 Timothy 2:15). Christians — ministers and laymen — need to be careful that their ministry is characterized by an accurate use of the Scriptures. An accurate use of the Scriptures means one not only "preaches the Word," but one also "counsels the Word" of God.

The Bible warns believers that the Church will be inundated with doctrines of demons, myths, perverse teachings, human traditions, worldly fables, philosophies, speculations, and deceiving spirits. This is certainly true of the Church in our day. Many in the Church have become so gullible it seems they no longer have the ability to discern truth from error. It seems that many believers do not have the ability to sort things out, to distinguish between God's thoughts and ways and man's thoughts and ways. There is nothing that demonstrates this more than the gospel of selfism.

Help for Archie began with giving him biblical hope. Losing hope is a serious concern. When a person loses hope, there is a danger of falling into despair and concluding there is no solution to their problem. They are the ones who shoot themselves, divorce their spouse, or choose to live with their chronic depression.

The prophet Ezekiel wrote, "You will loathe yourselves in your own sight for all the evil things that you have done" (20:43, NAS). People do not hate themselves. People hate their circumstances and their behaviors that led to those circumstances. Self-love is universal. Paul wrote, "No one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it." If Archie truly hated himself, he would not want things to be better for himself, but worse. Archie nourishes and cherishes himself, and that is why he came for counseling.

Archie's troubles were not the result of self-hatred and low self-esteem, but his sinful behavior and/or attitudes. Sinners prefer themselves over others and God (universal self-love). A study of Archie's life revealed sinful patterns and habits. He had been fired twice for quarreling with his superior, and quit three other jobs because he believed he was not being treated fairly. When we started counseling, Archie had not worked for over a year. He admitted to anger, bitterness, envy, marital discord, and money problems.

Sin, not low self-esteem, was Archie's problem. Archie lacked self-control. He was filled with self-pity. Envy usually accompanies self-pity. Archie was envious of Edith, who had both a good job and work record. Archie was envious of his brother who could afford things that he could not. Archie was idle. Archie failed to pay his bills and was dodging creditors. Archie was unrepentant of his anger and bitterness.

Dr. Karl Menninger, in his book, *Whatever Became of Sin?*, speaking about modern prophets, secular and religious, wrote:

“In all of the laments and reproaches made by our seers and prophets, one misses any mention of ‘sin,’ a word which used to be a veritable watchword of prophets. It was a word once in everyone’s mind, but now rarely if ever heard. Does that mean that no sin is involved in all our troubles — sin with an ‘I’ in the middle? Is no one any longer guilty of anything? Guilty perhaps of a sin that could be repented and repaired or atoned for? Is it only that someone may be stupid or sick or criminal — or asleep? Wrong things are being done ... But is no one responsible, no one answerable for these acts? Anxiety and depression we all acknowledge, and even vague guilt feelings; but has no one committed any sin?”¹

Archie portrayed himself as a victim. He complained that he was always being misunderstood and mistreated. He was bitter and angry with his parents, his wife, his employers, his brother, and his sister-in-law. Archie was bitter and angry toward God, too.

Archie’s sinful behavior and attitude resulted in feelings of guilt. Archie felt bad. Archie should feel bad. People, like Archie, whose lives have been disrupted by feelings of guilt are referred to counselors who help them build their self-esteem. Low self-esteem is a euphemism for guilt. James Dobson says that low self-esteem leads to all kinds of sinful behavior such as “neuroticism, hatred, alcoholism, drug abuse, violence, and social disorder.”² In other words, low self-esteem leads to sin, and therefore, nurturing self-esteem leads to righteousness. Unlike Scripture (Jeremiah 17:9), nowhere in psychology is the wicked heart mentioned. Nowhere is sin, the cross, the Holy Spirit, and progressive sanctification mentioned. Sin produces guilt, which is reinterpreted or redefined as low self-esteem. John MacArthur wrote:

“Our culture has declared war on guilt. ... No one, after all, is supposed to feel guilty. Guilt is

not conducive to dignity and self-esteem. Society encourages sin, but it will not tolerate the guilt sin produces.”³

We have lost sight of the fact that sin, not low self-esteem, is the root cause of our problems and the source of many troubles. Today we are explaining these problems in unbiblical terms.

In Genesis 3:1-5 we have the first theological conversation ever recorded. The Serpent promised Eve “her eyes would be opened” if she would partake from the forbidden tree. Nothing would be hidden from her. Eve would understand the deep things of God. She would be like God.

The natural tendency of all men is to throw off the restraints of humanity and attempt to become God. What has grieved godly men and women over the years was their struggle with self. For example, in 1898, Andrew Murray wrote that “the one real hindrance to this life of the Spirit is the power of our evil self.”⁴ In 1945, L.E. Maxwell wrote, “Self has usurped the throne ... Self is the new and false center upon which man has fixed.”⁵ Thomas Watson wrote, “The more one values himself, the less God and angels value him. ... Self is an idol, and it is hard to sacrifice this idol.”⁶ Thomas Brooks wrote, “Self-seeking blinds the soul ... There is not a greater hindrance to all the duties of piety than self-seeking.”⁷ John Calvin wrote:

“... wherever denial of ourselves does not reign, there either the foulest vices rage without shame or if there is any semblance of virtue, it is vitiated by depraved lusting after glory. ... For, such is the blindness with which we all rush into self-love that each one of us seems to himself to have just cause to be proud of himself and to despise all others in comparison. ... There is no other remedy than to tear out from our inward parts this most deadly pestilence of love of strife and love of self.”⁸

Nouthetic counselor and author Martha Peace writes:

“‘Self’ is at the center of our lusts — our supposed needs for significance, worth, security, identity, or esteem. A psychologized, man-centered view of God and of man appeals to our natural sense of loving ourselves and thus deceives us.”⁹

And most importantly, the Apostle Paul, under inspiration of the Holy Spirit, wrote: “For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another” (Galatians 5:17, NAS). They all wrote about the same thing. The struggle in their life is between God and self.

There is a struggle in the life of every believer to keep God on the throne of his heart. It is difficult because man’s heart is constantly and relentlessly trying to dethrone God and enthrone self. Trying to keep God on the throne of one’s heart is like a tug-of-war. It is the flesh warring against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh. “I want God on the throne. I want self on the throne. God. Self. God. Self.”

The allure to be God is present in every man’s heart. Isaiah said it when he wrote, “All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way” (53:6). Man suppresses the truth of God and uplifts self (Romans 1:18). Although man knows there is a God, he does not honor God, but honors self (Romans 1:21). Man worships and serves the creature rather than the Creator (Romans 1:25). Paul’s words are true of all men. All men have a worship-orientation. No man is neutral. All men are worshippers. All men are self-worshippers.

Eve’s desire to worship God changed to a lust to be God and worship self. Eve wanted to climb to heaven, as it were, and throw God out. Isaiah wrote about Lucifer’s desire to be God: “But you said in your heart, I will ascend to heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God, and I will sit on the mount, I will ascend above the heights of the

clouds; I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:13-14).

The Serpent knew Eve could not resist self-exaltation. We, the offspring of Adam and Eve, cannot resist it either. We are idolaters. We are self-worshippers. John Calvin wrote that "we may gather that man's nature, so to speak, is a perpetual factory of idols."¹⁰

Over the past several decades, the concept of self-esteem has had a powerful influence on the Church. Christians, who have generally thought of self-esteem as sinful, continue to be prompted by Christian authors in their books to develop a "healthy" self-esteem. These authors have warned that a negative self-esteem is the basis of most psychological problems and that it even leads to sinful behavior.

If the advocates of self-esteem are right, we must change our emphasis from man's unworthiness and focus on man's worthiness and his right to esteem himself. The Church will need to recognize the tremendous signifi-

cance that this teaching will have in the lives of its members.

But if the advocates of self-esteem are wrong, then clearly the Church's fascination with self-esteem is heretical. Jesus called His followers to imitate Him in denying themselves (Matthew 16:24). While not endorsing all of his positions, we agree with T.B. Maston when he stated:

"The cross, with all that it symbolizes, permeates and gives meaning and unity to all the ethical teachings of Jesus."¹¹

Jesus consistently tied together self-denial and the cross. The call of God into the Christian life is a call to self-denial. The cross — self-denial — is the path of every Christian. The antithesis of the cross is self-love. Therefore, self-love is classified as a "different gospel" (Galatians 1:6), opposed to the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

Endnotes:

1. Karl Menninger, *Whatever Became of Sin?* New York: Hawthorn Books, Inc., 1973, pg. 13.
2. James Dobson, *Hide and Seek*. Grand

Rapids, Mich.: Flemming H. Revell, 1979, pg. 21.

3. John F. MacArthur, Jr., *The Vanishing Conscience*. Dallas: Word Publishing Company, 1994, pg. 19.

4. Andrew Murray in William Law, *Freedom From a Self-Centered Life / Dying to Self*. Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1977, pg. 6.

5. L.E. Maxwell, *Born Crucified*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1973, pg. 56.

6. Thomas Watson, *The Duty of Self-Denial (and Ten Other Sermons)*. Morgan, Penna.: Soli Deo Gloria Publications, 1998, pp. 14, 29.


7. Thomas Brooks, *Precious Remedies Against Satan's Devices*. Carlisle, Penna.: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1968, pg. 189.

8. John T. McNeill, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*. Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1960, Vol. 1, pp. 691-694, (Institutes 3.7.2,4).

9. Martha Peace, *Attitudes of a Transformed Heart*. Bemidji, Minn.: Focus Publishing, 2002, pg. 41.

10. *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, op. cit., Vol. 1, pg. 108, (Institutes 1.11.8).

11. T.B. Maston, *Biblical Ethics*. Waco, Texas: Word Books Publishers, 1967, pg. 162.

Editor's Note: A fuller treatment by Dr. Tyler of the self-esteem gospel is available in his work, *Jesus Christ: Self-Denial or Self-Esteem?* (Timeless Texts, 2002). 

EDITORIALS

(continued from page 2)

facts do not matter. False prophecies are proclaimed and the false prophets are revered all the more. The lying prophets go on record and their record shows them to be fabricators and dissemblers. Claims are made with no documentation. Outright lies are constructed. When the lies are confronted, the response is, "touch not the Lord's anointed," yet it is obvious they are not the Lord's anointed. They live in obscene luxury, but are given a pass because money is equated with the blessing of God. There is no financial accountability.

3. *The local church*. The epistles bear out the importance of the local church in God's program. However, that is not the emphasis of the wandering apostles and prophets. Anointing centers, mass meetings, healing encounters, following the next "revival" or "breakthrough" are more important. Find a "blessing" center (code for adrenalin out of control) or a place where God may be doing divine dentistry, dispensing gold dust, or leaving angel feathers. One can always be "slain in the Spirit," which makes local church meetings seem downright dull.

Scream, shout, let it all hang out, shelve your mind, go into altered states, but don't dare talk about the local church.

4. *Sound doctrine*. There is a frightening cross-breeding of heresies today that will produce more mutant doctrines warned about in Scripture. Oneness Pentecostals pollinate across Assembly of God lines. Deniers of the Trinity such as T.D. Jakes and Tommy Tenney mingle with orthodoxy as though they were straight on the doctrine of God. Arch-heretic Finis Dake is promoted via his study Bible.

Benny Hinn promises he will break financial bondage if one will send the prophesied amount of \$77. His God resembles a slot machine in Las Vegas or Atlantic City more than a Heavenly Father. Then there's the outrage of Jerry Falwell endorsing "Brother Benny."

Jesse Duplantis claims to have a car that raptured him in a cloud from place to place and people believe it. Duplantis revels in referring to himself as the "Ragin Cajun" and has more the demeanor of a hokey professional wrestler than a man of God. Oh yes, Duplantis talks routinely about meeting Paul and Jesus in heaven and it never dawns on listeners that he is suggesting a