

# OpenTheo

## Self Love vs Self Denial



### **Toward a Radically Christian Counterculture** - Steve Gregg

In this discussion, Steve Gregg explores the conflict between self-love and self-denial in contemporary culture. He notes that the current culture tends to value and prioritize the self, as evidenced by the importance placed on concepts such as self-image and self-esteem. However, this self-focus can lead to negative attitudes towards others, such as resentment and hate toward those of the opposite sex. Gregg suggests that a balanced approach that incorporates both self-love and self-denial may be the most beneficial for individuals and society as a whole.

### **Transcript**

Tonight, we'll be talking about how the culture of self-denial confronts the culture of self-love. I was not sure what to call that second culture, the culture of self-love. I almost called it the culture of self-worship or self-idolatry.

Or we could use the word self-esteem or something like that, because those are terms that are very much key terms in describing the mentality and the values of the dominant culture in the late 20th and the early 21st centuries in the Western world. This is really ironic, because the Western world is that portion of the world that has longest known the things of God and has been most exposed historically to the Scriptures and yet has turned away from the message of Scriptures. And nowhere is that seen more clearly than in the current emphasis on self-love and self-esteem.

This is something that is probably the most striking difference between the culture of the world we live in and that radically Christian counterculture that we are called to live out in front of the world. There are many differences, of course, between the way that our culture as Christians is to be expressed from that of the world, but probably nowhere more than in the issue of what is thought about self. I found that same sentiment expressed recently when we were in our family devotions studying D. Martin Lloyd-Jones' studies in the Sermon on the Mount, which was published in 1959 and 60.

And if you're not familiar with D. Martin Lloyd-Jones, he was, in the early part of the 20th century and into the second half, a leading evangelical preacher in England. And he is

sometimes referred to as the last of the Puritans. Some of us have learned to appreciate the Puritan writers.

Some of you may not have come to that point yet where you appreciate them. There are many old Puritan writers from previous centuries, but D. Martin Lloyd-Jones has been referred to as the last of the Puritans, but then people since him have been referred to the last of the Puritans. J.I. Packer has been called that too.

I guess we should probably deduce we haven't seen the last of the Puritans yet. But he was one of my favorite authors of this century. And we came across this when we were reading the studies in the Sermon on the Mount.

And he was talking about the first beatitude, which is, blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. And D. Martin Lloyd-Jones made this comment. He says, you will never find a greater antithesis to the worldly spirit and outlook than that which you find in this first beatitude.

What emphasis the world places on its belief in self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-expression. Look at its literature. If you want to get on in this world, it says, believe in yourself.

That idea is absolutely controlling in the life of men at the present time. Indeed, I would say it is controlling the whole of life outside of the Christian message. And I think that although he wrote this back when I was a little child, what he said was not only true then, but has become even more strikingly true as the 20th century wore on in its second half and as we have shifted to the 21st century.

Our culture is a culture that reveres self, worships and idolizes self. And the words self-image and self-esteem and self-love are the words that express this to a great extent. Back when D. Martin Lloyd-Jones wrote that statement, terms like self-reliance, self-confidence, and self-expression were key terms that were expressing this sentiment.

Since that time, the terms self-love, self-esteem have become more prevalent. But self is nonetheless the center. And there are many symptoms of self being at the center of the dominant culture.

And as we look at those symptoms, of course, we can see that to a certain extent, we may find that self is more at the center of our own lives than we would prefer to acknowledge. But there are symptoms of self at the center of a culture and of a life. Some of those symptoms are those I've given in the notes under number one, several things which I consider to be all very similar and symptomatic of self-centeredness.

Those things would include racism, what is usually called sexism, nationalism, and down on the more local levels, team loyalty and school spirit and things like that. Now, am I saying it's bad to have any of these things? Well, the question is, what are these

symptoms of? What causes these things? Why do some people think their school is better than other schools? Well, some people actually have objective reason to think so. I was in school politics when I was in high school, but I never had a school spirit.

I never could figure out why it would be true for us to say that our school is the greatest school, when it really wasn't. It just seemed to me that we were told to whip up ourselves into a furor at rallies before football games, things like that, to say we're the best, we're the greatest, our team's the greatest, even though the actual scores of the games didn't necessarily reflect that reality. But we still felt we were the greatest, and all other schools were the bad guys, we were the good guys, and I couldn't figure out exactly why.

As I got older and reflected, I realized it's because our school is the best because it was ours, and because we are the center of our lives. And there was no other objective standard by which we could say our school was the best, but we said it anyway because it was ours, because it is mine. It is my school.

It must be the best because it's mine and I'm me. And I'm at the center of my evaluation of all things and how they relate to me. Team spirit's similar to that.

I lived in Oregon for many years. I lived in the Portland area for over ten years, and there was this thing called Blazer Mania. I think Blazers are a basketball team.

Actually, I know they are, but the fact of the matter is I couldn't care less. And at certain seasons, all of Portland and all the surrounding cities have these signs up, Go Blazers, and all this other stuff, and I thought, why? Why does it matter if the Blazers win, lose, or don't even play at all? Who cares? What makes the Blazers someone that we can get excited about? And the fact was, of course, I realized the reason that Oregonians like the Blazers is because it's their team. The men on the team aren't particularly better men than the men on other teams, in terms of virtue.

They're not necessarily better family men. They're not necessarily better godly men. There's really nothing about those men that should make me prefer them to win a game instead of someone else win a game.

It's just because they're from our city. They're ours. And because they're ours, we esteem them best.

And there's really no objective reason to think they're us. Now, of course, there were times when I guess the Blazers did pretty well in the NBA, but even if they don't, even if they're doing poorly, there have been some years they did pretty poorly from what I understand, and that didn't change the fear. Everyone was still into the Blazers because the Blazers were us, basically, and we worship us.

It's self-centeredness. Now, I mentioned also nationalism, sexism, and racism as similar

symptoms, and they are. A person who is a racist believes his race is the best race because of what? Have you ever met a racist who thought some other race was the best race? You ever met a white racist who thought the blacks were the greatest race, or the Orientals, or the American Indians, or the Mexicans? I've never really met anyone who is a racist who thought that some race other than his own was the greatest race.

The racist always believes his race is the best. And it doesn't matter which race he's of. A person can be a racist of any race.

A black man can be a racist. An Oriental can be a racist. An Indian, a Hispanic, a white man.

They can all be racist, and they all believe that their race is the greatest, and they've got loyalty to their race. Why? For what reason? Now, I don't know. I suppose if you go through history, some races have made greater accomplishments than others, and made greater contributions to the benefit of society or whatever.

But I'm not really sure. I'm not really sure. I mean, even those races that made great contributions have their share of ugliness, too.

And I can't really think of any race that just stands out head and shoulders above other races as being the great one. But a racist thinks his race is the best, and the reason he does is because it's his, and there's no other reason to do so. It's his race, and because it's his, and he's at the center of his world, his race is absolutely defining, and the loyalty to his race is very important.

Same thing with sexism. Of course, there are female and male sexists. The feminist movement basically is pretty much down on men, and there are a lot of men who come to the point of being down on women, although they don't really have a movement named after them.

I guess they're just called chauvinists. But the fact is, some people just decide that their gender is the superior gender. And, of course, there are differences between the sexes, but it seems to me like there's kind of a tradeoff or kind of a balance out.

I mean, it seems like males have some strong points where women are weak, and women have some strong points where men are weak, and I'm not really sure that any objective test could be run to say that, you know, this gender is definitely the better gender than this one in all respects. And yet, that doesn't change the fact that some people, they simply look down on anyone of the opposite sex, or hate them, or resent them. Why? Because they are of the opposite sex, not ours, not mine.

And so also with nationalism. Now, I realize that patriotism and nationalism are very close to each other, and I believe there are times when we certainly can be, have reason to be pleased with what our country has done, you know, on some particular thing, in

some particular area, some exploit. But every country has its great triumphs, and every country has its dark side too, including our own.

And yet, that doesn't keep people, no matter what country they belong to, from being nationalistic. Nationalism means that you believe your nation is the best. Now, there might be some indicators, and I usually will say this, although I'm not a patriot, I do believe that America, in many respects, is the best place to live in the world.

I think, of course I haven't lived anywhere else. I've traveled around the world, and I haven't been anywhere I'd rather live than here. But then if I spoke the languages over there, I might find it just as good as I like it here.

You know, I just feel foreign when I'm in Germany, or Switzerland, or Korea, or Japan. You know, I mean, they don't seem like as good a place to live as here to me, but then I'm not them. I wouldn't be surprised if they thought their country was the best place to live.

And, you know, nationalism really doesn't require any rational basis. Not a rational basis, a national basis. It's the nation you belong to, and because you belong to it, it's yours, and you are excited about it, because you're excited about you.

It's self at the center again. It's a symptom of that. On the personal level, there are other symptoms of being self-centered.

Jealousy and envy are among them. Some of my children, when they were young, and when they wanted things we couldn't afford, because someone else had them, you know, some friends of theirs had something, and the kids would like them, and I knew we couldn't afford it. I'd just say, well, we don't have to have those things.

Why don't we just enjoy the fact that they have them? Well, that never seemed to work with the kids. It worked for me. It worked for me.

I don't want the burden of more possessions. I've got plenty as it is. I'd like to have fewer if I could, but whenever I see someone else has a nice car or a nice house, I just enjoy the fact that they've got it.

That's so much easier, so much simpler. Then you don't have to have the thing. You can enjoy theirs, and they can have all the burden of it.

That just makes sense to me. But, no, I mean, most children, they just don't get that picture. I won't be happy until I have one of my own, and that's where jealousy and envy come from.

It's not enough that somebody has something nice. It's got to be me that has something nice, and if I don't and they do, then I resent them. And so, jealousy and envy and resentment and sometimes even anger manifest themselves because of self.

Now, anger is a tricky thing, and I don't want to get into a long thing about anger. Anger is not always self-centered, but most of it is. There is righteous anger.

We know this because Jesus was righteous, and he got angry. The Bible says he got angry. In Mark chapter 3, it says he looked on the Pharisees with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts.

Paul tells us in Ephesians 4, Be angry, but do not sin. So there is such a thing as being angry and not sinning, but it's pretty rare among us. Most of our anger is more likely to be sinful than otherwise.

And the sinful anger is that which is irritated because of something that has been done to us. Jesus got angry, but he never got angry at what people did to him. In fact, when they really did bad stuff to him, he said, Father, forgive them.

They don't know what they do. He didn't get ruffled at all about that. He got ruffled about them defiling the house of God.

He got angry about them exploiting the poor and doing hypocritical things to misrepresent God and religion. But his anger was never self-centered. When people gave him reasons to be angry at them, he didn't get angry.

And so there is a righteous anger, and I'm not saying that it's never the case that if you or I get angry, I can't say it's not ever righteous. It could be, but it's much more common, I think, for people who get angry to get angry because they have been irritated, because something they wanted was denied. And again, it's a symptom of being self-centered.

A lot of other things are also symptomatic of self-centeredness in society, and it creeps into the Christian life as well. Boasting, name dropping is a form of boasting, making sure you get the credit for something that you did. You want to make sure everyone knows you did it.

Self-pity on the other end of the spectrum. I think an awful lot of depression that people go and get antidepressant drugs for is probably not much else than a symptom of self-pity. I don't deny that there are some chemical or hormonal states that the body can be in that do encourage a depressed, both physically and emotionally, condition.

But a great deal of depression is simply self-pity, I believe. And self-pity is a self-centered thing. Why not just stop pitying yourself and start pitying someone who's got it worse than you? There's a lot of them around.

How about instead of pitying yourself, you know, it's good to have pity, but why don't you pity somebody who's worse off than you, someone who deserves it more than you do? When I meet people who are indulging in self-pity, I have a hard time pitying them. I figure they're getting more than their share of pity already. I'll save mine for someone

who really deserves it.

I can't imagine. I mean, I've got sins. I've got sins of my own, but self-pity isn't one of them.

I don't think I'm vulnerable to that because I'm in awe of the great benefits that I have received that I don't deserve. I'm not aware of any troubles I've had that I don't deserve. I'm aware of troubles I deserve that I never got.

But, I mean, it's very obvious to me that I've never had any troubles that weren't fully deserved by me, or if I didn't deserve those particular ones, I deserved as much. Like my first daughter who's now grown. There were times when she was little that we thought she might be lying, and we weren't sure.

We couldn't prove that she was lying, but we're pretty sure she was. And we caught her doing this many times. We thought, well, we've got to discipline this.

I mean, if she gets away with it, it's not going to be any good. So there were times we actually disciplined her when we weren't positive she was lying, but we really believed she was. And we said, well, listen, if you happen to be innocent on this occasion, remember all the times that you were guilty and you didn't get disciplined.

And you can take this as payment for one of those, you know. I mean, that's how I take it when I suffer something. I don't see an obvious connection between what I've done wrong and getting something bad happen to me.

But I know that I've done plenty of things wrong that I didn't have any obvious consequences I suffered for. And so if I suffer some discomfort or suffering when I don't see any obvious reason for deserving it, I can count that as maybe some past due trouble that I brought on myself. Self-pity is not one of my problems.

I've got other problems, but that's not it. Indifference to the suffering of others is a very common problem in a spoiled and pampered society such as ours. Again, self-pity kind of makes you incapable of pitying others.

And even if you're not pitying yourself, a lot of times you're just so wrapped up in yourself. When I say you, I'm using the editorial you. I'm not talking about you particularly, individuals here.

I don't know. But if you are incapable of hurting with the pains of other people, if you don't feel the pains of others, it is because self is occupying too much of your attention and concern, I believe. Therefore, discontent and unthankfulness are also indications that self is at the center of the line.

In terms of our present culture, there are many evidences that self is at the center of

everything. I went to the Internet yesterday. I went to Amazon.com just to check some of the leading titles that are related to self-interest.

Now, these are non-Christian books and so forth. But just to kind of illustrate what's selling and what our culture is into, let me give you the names of some of the books that are selling pretty well right now. *How to Raise Your Self-Esteem*.

I won't give a synopsis of every book. The synopsis of this book said this. Comforting and optimistic, this important self-help book is filled with step-by-step techniques for developing and strengthening feelings of self-worth.

Shows the readers how they can raise self-confidence, self-esteem, and commit themselves to happier, healthier lives. Then from the publisher it says, of all the judgments you make in life, none is as important as the one you make about yourself. The difference between low self-esteem and high self-esteem is the difference between passivity and action, between failure and success.

Now one of America's foremost psychologists and a pioneer in self-esteem development offers a step-by-step guide to strengthening your sense of self-worth. Here are simple, straightforward, and effective techniques that will dramatically improve the way you think and feel about yourself. You'll learn how to break free of negative self-concepts and self-defeating behavior.

How to dissolve internal barriers to success in work and love. How to overcome anxiety, depression, guilt, and anger. How to conquer the fear of intimacy and success.

How to find and keep the courage to love yourself and much more. Frankly, I don't really think it takes exceptional courage to love yourself. I think it's very natural to love yourself.

I think it's a cowardly thing to do as a matter of fact. But this is the kind of message we get a great deal. Here's a book that's available.

It says, *30 Days to High Self-Esteem*. And that one was not really very complete. There's another one called, *52 Things You Can Do to Raise Your Self-Esteem*.

And then there's *611 Ways to Boost Your Self-Esteem*. And the subtitle is, *Accept Your Love Handles and Everything About Yourself*. I guess that means these little bits of fat that you can pinch.

Let's see here. On this *30 Days to High Self-Esteem*, the subtitle is, *How to Change Your Life So You Have Joy, Bliss, and Abundance*. And the foreword was written by Jack Canfield, co-author of *Chicken Soup for the Soul*.

And he said, You are about to embark on a month-long journey that can powerfully



change your life for the better. In only 31 days, you can build your self-esteem to new levels. The result is a powerful program that can radically transform your life.

Now, the reason I read that little bit, I could read similar things on each of these books, but notice what is being promised here in the name of self-esteem. Transformation. You can transform your life.

You can powerfully change your life for the better. How to change your life so you have joy, bliss, and abundance. Accept your love handles and everything about yourself.

It's a whole transformation of your life that is promised through increased self-esteem. What's amazing is the things that are promised, many of them are things that Jesus Christ promises too, but through the opposite route, not through self-esteem, as we shall see. Here's another book, Maximum Self-Esteem, the handbook for reclaiming your sense of self-worth.

Here's another book, Nine Chances to Feel Good About Yourself. Here's one, Honoring the Self. Honoring the Self.

And here's one, Believing in Myself. These are book titles that are available today. And then they have a children's book for ages 3 to 10 called Lovables in the Kingdom of Self-Esteem.

If you're afraid your children don't have enough self-esteem, you might want to look into this book. Here's what they say about it, annotation. Various animals in the kingdom of self-esteem illustrate the different qualities that contribute to being lovable and having self-esteem.

The publisher says, I am lovable, I am lovable, I am lovable. With these magical words, the gates to the kingdom of self-esteem swing open for readers of all ages. Inside the kingdom live the lovables, 24 animals who help children feel unique, enthusiastic, confident and loved.

Well, obviously this is a big deal. They want the children to learn self-esteem from an early age too. I noticed also they're selling, through Amazon.com, some Earth Stability and Self-Esteem Wicca candles.

These candles, I guess you light these candles and they increase Earth Stability and Self-Esteem. And they are part of Wicca, which is of course witchcraft worship. Now, this is the world's fascination with self-esteem.

Oh, I failed to mention, everyone now knows, of course we even have a major magazine out, simply called Self. Frankly, a magazine called Self would never have gone over 30 years ago, or 40 years ago. I mean, it would have been regarded as the most... Everyone would have been embarrassed to buy it.

Because they'd be looked at as if they're totally self-centered. But now it's a respectable magazine. And the titles of articles on that resemble the titles of a lot of these books that are available.

Self, the word self, used to function in English language as a suffix or a prefix. Predominantly a prefix for other words, for personal pronouns. Like, well, it'd be a suffix for herself, himself, myself.

It was just part of a word, it wasn't really a thing in itself. Self is not a thing. Self was simply a way of distinguishing a person from other persons.

So, you speak of him, himself, as opposed to him and others. Or him, you know, compared with others, it's within himself. In modern usage, however, the self has become a thing, a noun, an entity to be found.

You've got to find yourself. Imaged, you've got to have a self-image. Accepted, you need self-acceptance.

Esteemed, self-esteem is all the rage. Gratified, self-gratification. And satisfied, self-satisfaction.

These are the goals of the modern self-culture, the culture of self-love. Not only has self come to have respectability as an entity in itself, it has rapidly gained respectability as a dictator and an idol whose interests, needs, and rights are to be given first priority in order to maintain mental health. Mental health and self-esteem are considered to be very closely related by modern worldly thinkers.

If you have low self-esteem, you're considered to be in danger of being mentally ill. And some writers say that basically all criminals and criminal behavior is motivated by low self-esteem. This is not what the Bible teaches, and it's not even what conventional wisdom would have taught people 30, 40 years ago.

But it is something that has simply taken over our society in modern times. And you may wonder how it got to be where it is. Now, frankly, some of the things I just said, you might say, well, what's wrong with those things? I mean, isn't that right? Remember, you were raised, many of you, in the last 30 years and 40 years, and some of you may never have checked what you learned against what the Bible says.

But the message of self-love and self-esteem did not come from the Bible. In a book called *The Danger of Self-Love*, published by Moody Press in Chicago in 1982, Dr. Paul Brownbeck wrote, quote, The bottom line of existentialism is philosophical selfishness. People have always been selfish, but existentialism provided a philosophical justification for it.

Unquote. Being fascinated with and concerned about self is not a new thing. It's been

around since the Garden of Eden, but most people used to be ashamed of it, or ashamed to admit it.

To be selfish is still considered a bad word. To be self-centered is probably considered to be a bad word in most companies. But to be self-gratified, to have high self-esteem, to have self-love, are not considered to be bad things for some reason.

In the book, *Prophets of Psychoheresy*, book one, the married couple who wrote the *Psychoheresy* books, Martin and Dieter Bobgan, wrote, quote, The great emphasis on self-esteem was mainly introduced into the 20th century through psychologist William James. His study of the self centered on self-feelings, self-love, and self-estimation. He used the word self-esteem to indicate positive self-feelings as contrasted with negative self-feelings.

Self-esteem and self-love theories were further developed by humanistic psychologists such as Eric Fromm, Alfred Adler, and Abraham Maslow. Now, it's really about time the secular world became honest about this anyway. For them to say, we believe in self-love, we believe in self-esteem is quite consistent with the way the worldly people have always lived anyway.

We shouldn't really have too much alarm at the world expressing as a value the need for self-esteem and self-love. But what's scary is when the church does the same thing. And as you well know, I'm sure, if you've been to very many churches or read many Christian books or heard many Christian radio programs, the church has bought into this self-esteem business without much criticism in general.

Now, there are some sectors of criticism being raised, but for the most part, the biggest churches, the biggest selling authors and so forth are often those that are promoting self-esteem. And so, the self-esteem culture, the self-love culture has come to church. Let me give you some quotes here.

They're in your notes. David Seamans is an author of many best-selling Christian books, a psychologist. And his books are in Christian bookstores.

They're not secular books. And in his book, *Putting Away Childish Things*, David Seamans wrote, Jesus said that we should love God with our whole hearts and love our neighbors as we love ourselves. Love for self is as necessary for maturity and holiness as is love for God and love for other people.

Indeed, loving God and loving my neighbor requires a measure of self-acceptance and self-love in which I hold my selfhood in esteem, integrity, identity, and respect." Now, I wouldn't be surprised if some of you are so accustomed to hearing this kind of language that you think, Steve, is this something you're critical of? Isn't this true? I mean, doesn't the Bible say you should love your neighbor as you love yourself? And doesn't that mean

you must therefore love yourself? Yes, it does mean you must. It doesn't mean you must learn to. It means you must already love yourself.

If you're told to love your neighbor as you love yourself, the presupposition is you do love yourself and not with any deficient love at all. Because you love yourself already in the measure that you are told to love your neighbor. The measure that you are to love your neighbor is to be gauged by how much you already love yourself.

Many people have turned this statement of Jesus into three commands. Jesus said there are two commands that are the great commands. One is love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and love your neighbor as you love yourself.

Jesus said that's two. Modern Christian rites turn it into three. Love God, love your neighbor, and love yourself.

There's no command to love yourself. There's not even any encouragement to love yourself. There's no suggestion that loving yourself is a positive thing.

It is simply indicated that it is a natural and universal thing. The Apostle Paul said in Ephesians 5, No man yet ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it as Christ does the church. A man naturally loves himself and cherishes himself.

The difficulty is not to get people to love themselves enough, but to get them to love anyone else as much as they already love themselves. Now, Dr. Seamans, this is an incredible statement he has made. He says, Love for self is as necessary for maturity and wholeness as is love for God and for other people.

Now, does the Bible say that to be whole and holy, you need to love yourself as much as you need to love God, and as much as you need to love other people? It says nothing like that. In fact, the Bible throughout the entire pages of Scripture insists on the need for us to love God. And likewise, a theme of the whole Scripture is we need to love other people.

There's not one place in the Bible that says we need to love ourselves. As a matter of fact, you'll find when we look at the Scriptures on the subject that the Bible always treats love for self as a negative, as something that is a liability, not something to be cherished and nourished and coddled and encouraged. Another Christian author, this man has written many commentaries, but he also wrote a book called *The Christian Looks at Himself*.

His name is Anthony Huckema. He said, Under the influence of humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow, many of us Christians have begun to see our need for self-love and self-esteem. Now, it's not always that a Christian writer will admit this.

But this guy didn't seem to realize what he was admitting. He's writing a book about self-

esteem. He's for it.

And he says, you know, many of us Christians didn't figure this out until we read the humanistic psychologists like Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow. And what do you know? There it is. It's in their writings and we didn't even know it was right until we read them.

And now we do know it's right. Well, there's a reason that we didn't know it was right, we Christians, because we used to read the Bible. And the Bible says the opposite.

Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow are atheists. And Carl Rogers, in particular, is an occultist. Here's a guy who tells us we need to learn to love ourselves.

Carl Rogers. What do you know about Carl Rogers? Well, he was happily married for many, many years. And then his wife took very ill and required a lot of care.

And he decided that was too much work, so he divorced her. And took off with some young whore. Later, he felt kind of guilty about this.

And so he contacted his wife after she died with a Ouija board. And through the Ouija board, she said, I forget the exact words, something like, enjoy, Carl, enjoy, or something like that. And it was, you know, don't worry, everything's okay.

What you did to me, no problem. And when Carl Rogers shared this at a conference a few years back, he says, boy, did I ever get a sense of relief when I got that message, I'll tell you. I mean, he's been struggling with all, he even go to a therapist himself a great deal, trying to get over his guilt feelings.

Well, this guy now, he realizes that his wife, who communicated through a Ouija board to him after she died, doesn't mind that he took off with a young hussy. And so he feels much better about it. And he's the guy who's giving spiritual counsel to Christians who previously didn't know what this man knows about spiritual well-being.

How about this one? You'll know this name, Robert Shuler, pastor of the Crystal Cathedral, Garden Grove, California, in his book, *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation*. Now, if you read the *New Reformation, Self-Esteem*, by Robert Shuler, you'll find that he believes that the awakening of the church to the need for self-esteem is as important and advanced for the church as the Reformation was. And this is like a second Reformation.

Martin Luther's Reformation was good for the church, but now we need another thing comparable, and that is the Self-Esteem Reformation. That's what his book is about. And in the book, *Self-Esteem, the New Reformation*, Robert Shuler made this statement.

He said, quote, Self-esteem is the single greatest need facing the human race today, unquote. Now, think about the human race, if you would. That includes Muslims, Hindus,

a lot of them, Jews, atheists, Christians.

What's the greatest need of the human race today? What would most Christians think would be the greatest need of the world today? How about Jesus? How about salvation? No, says Pastor Shuler. Self-esteem is the single greatest need facing the human race today. So all these people, they don't need Jesus half so much as they just need to learn to esteem themselves, says this leading writer.

Now, you know that Robert Shuler has a huge congregation. He's a best-selling author. He's on the radio.

He's on TV. He's got an enormous audience, and he's one of the keynote speakers usually at church growth conferences. If you're not aware of the church growth movement, it's all over the place.

The pastors of some of the largest churches go around and tell little wannabe pastors how to make their churches huge, humongous churches. And Robert Shuler is almost always one of the headlining speakers there. And so little pastors who want big churches go and listen to men like this, who have this conviction.

You know what people need more than anything in the world? Self-esteem. The church needs a revolution, a reformation in self-esteem. That's not biblical.

That's not what the Bible says. That's not what Jesus said. That is what leading Christian people are saying.

In fact, I hope I won't offend anyone. Here's another leading Christian, the good doctor, James Dobson. In his book, *What Wives Wish Their Husbands Knew About Women*, on page 35, Dr. Dobson said this, Now, again, a secular humanist might well conclude such things, although the research would be against it.

Actually, self-love has not been found to curtail criminal behavior. Most studies have shown that criminals have an incredibly high self-esteem. Men who are in federal penitentiaries have been tested, given self-esteem tests.

They love themselves. They think they're great. They think they're brilliant.

These guys measure some of the highest self-esteem factors in the country, is criminals. Yet, in Dr. Dobson's book, *Hide or Seek*, he indicated that virtually all antisocial and criminal behavior is due to a low self-esteem. Well, Dr. Dobson is a very nice man.

He's a brother. I expect to go to heaven with him, but I wouldn't want to be in his shoes there, because teachers have a stricter judgment. And when you have millions of Christians reading your books and listening to you every day, and you say this kind of thing, well, I mean, I think he's going to be saved, yet it's by fire.

Frankly, I mean, the wood, hay, and stubble that he's teaching is really bad stuff, and he's not getting it from God. He's not getting it from the Bible. He's getting it from where? He's getting it from the psychology books.

It's not coming from God's Word. And it's contrary to God's Word. Just say, if I could just write a prescription for every woman, I'd just give them a big healthy dose of self-esteem.

I'm sure there's nothing they need so much as that. That is, well, Dr. Dobson, of course, has gotten some criticism in the evangelical world. Not enough, I'm afraid.

I mean, Dr. Dobson is a good man in many areas. But in his area of self-esteem, he's gotten a bit of criticism, and he answered his critics once. I remember hearing on his program once that the next day, he's going to have a special program answering his critics on this issue of self-esteem.

So I made sure. I don't always listen, but I made sure I was listening that day and even recorded it. And it was a great disappointment to me, frankly.

I really kind of hoped he might give some kind of a biblical explanation of why self-esteem is actually good, even though the Bible says the opposite. And what he ended up doing was he read a series of letters that he gets from people. You know, young girls who are badly abused by their stepfathers and so forth, and they just really, you know, they're ashamed to go out, and they don't want to go to school because they just can't look people in the eye and so forth.

And he says he'd read letters like this, letter after letter. And each time he'd say, now, he says, now, who's going to tell me there's no such thing as low self-esteem? He says, this girl obviously has low self-esteem. Next letter.

And he read a bunch of letters, after which he'd always say, now, here's another example of low self-esteem. Oh, are we out of time for the program? Well, I hope I've answered my critics on this matter of self-esteem. I've proven there is such a thing as low self-esteem.

Well, there is no doubt such a thing as low self-esteem. There's no such thing as low self-love. And self-esteem, if it is low, is not a problem.

It is because a person with low self-esteem loves himself or herself that it becomes a problem to them. You see, I want to think well of the ones I love. And it pains me to have to think badly of people that I love.

Does it not? I mean, wouldn't you like to think the best of your children, or your parents, or your ancestors, or your best friend, or your pastor, if you have one? The people you love and respect, don't you want to think really highly of them? And isn't it a grief to you

when something comes manifest that they're not as good as you hoped they were, and maybe really some disgusting stuff comes out about them? Isn't that a grief to you because you love them and you want to think highly of them? Well, the reason low self-esteem hurts people is because they love themselves so much. If I say, boy, I've just discovered I'm a total scum. I've just discovered I used to think I was a pretty righteous Christian, and I just fell so badly, I can't think I'm any better than the worst of scum in the Christian church.

That's a good thing for me to realize. But if I love myself, it's going to be painful. I'm not going to want that realization.

I want to have high self-esteem if I love myself. By the way, you don't mind thinking badly of people you hate. When a girl looks in the mirror and sees a big zit on her nose and says, oh, I just hate myself.

Look at that big ugly zit. She doesn't hate herself. She loves herself.

That's why she doesn't like that zit being there spoiling her good looks. If you hate someone, you're glad to see them have a big ugly zit on their nose. It's self-love that is innate in every human being.

That's what we have to get over. And if you get over the self-love, low self-esteem isn't going to be a problem to you. I think I mentioned before when people ask me what they should do about self-esteem if they've got low self-esteem, I say, well, enjoy it while you can.

Because if you really do have low self-esteem, God will exalt you and then you'll have a hard time maintaining low self-esteem and then you really got problems. Because low self-esteem is realistic. It's what God wants us to know about ourselves.

We don't deserve any congratulations. We are scum and the sooner we realize it, the better off we are. Sometimes people who are Christians, who are criticizing this view that I believe, they'll call it worm theology.

Ever heard that one? Oh, we don't need any of that old worm theology that we had back in the days of the Puritans. That worm theology means, you know, I'm such a worm. Yeah, we don't want to hear that.

You know, we're men. We're humans. We're dignified.

We don't want to think of ourselves as worms. Well, you know what? In Psalm 22, you'll find this line, I am a worm and not a man. And you know who's saying it? Jesus.

Now, if He says He's a worm, then what's so wrong with me saying I'm a worm? The worst part of it is when I say it and I don't believe it. The fact of the matter is most



people who say I'm such a worm don't really believe they are. Because if you told them, yeah, you're right, you are a worm, they'd get very angry and defensive.

They want to say something that sounds very humble, but they don't want to be humble. They don't really want to not love themselves and not esteem themselves. There is such a thing as low self-esteem and it is hurt.

It is painful to you if you love yourself. If you get over that, however, if you learn to die to yourself, which is the call to Christ, is to die to yourself, then having low self-esteem doesn't hurt so bad. In fact, it's just instructive.

It's just helpful. So, you know, Dobson, unfortunately, as much as I have some very... I'm very fond of Dr. Dobson. It's kind of an irony because I'm so in disagreement with him on this self-esteem issue, which is a defining issue in his ministry, but on so many other things I like him, and I like him personally as a person.

But it's a shame that a man who seems to love the Lord so much, and I believe he does, would get sidetracked onto this self-esteem business so much and spoil, as far as I'm concerned, his ministry of the gospel because it's a different gospel, the gospel of self-esteem. People don't need anything half so much as they need self-esteem. Well, it used to be Christians said people don't need anything half so much as they need Jesus.

But now it's self-esteem. And these are the Christians telling us, leading Christians. Another well-known Christian author, Walter Trubisch, wrote a book called Love Yourself.

And he said, and listen to this, he says, quote, I wonder whether one of the deepest roots of the abortion problem does not lie here. Can an expectant mother who wishes to abort her child really love herself? Now, you thought he was going to say, can an expectant mother who really wishes to abort her child really love her child, right? I mean, obviously, the answer is no. She couldn't possibly love her child.

But he throws this curve in here. He says, can a woman who wants to abort her child really love herself? Well, duh, yeah. I mean, who else does she love? She doesn't love anyone half as much as she loves herself.

That's why she wants to kill someone else to preserve her happiness. That's one of the marks of self-love. That you don't care what happens to somebody else so long as you're happy, so long as your convenience isn't intruded into.

That's killed the thing. And this is a Christian author. And Christians read these books and they nod their heads and say, yeah, well, I guess, yeah, right.

I mean, this guy knows. He's a psychologist. He's a Christian.

He's a best-selling author. He's a pastor of a huge church. He's wrong.

He's a liar. But they speak not according to this word. There's no light in them, the Bible says.

And I don't care what their title is. They're wrong. Let me talk to you now about what the biblical message is concerning self.

Because a radically Christian counterculture is going to be a culture that has got to confront the culture of self-love. The modern evangelical church is not that radical Christian counterculture. It is not confronting that.

It is affirming it. It is flowing with the dominant culture away from biblical truth. But if we want to live as Christians and we want our collective witness to be that of a Christian culture and a Christian community, then we have to take a distinctively and radically Christian approach to the issue of self.

You know, there was a time when Christians could take a biblical approach to self and they wouldn't look that different than the rest of the culture because most of the culture... Well, I mean, they would in many ways look different, but most of the culture would agree verbally with what the Bible says about self. And I'm talking about most of the European history since the gospel arrived there. But now our culture has turned around and where people would have been ashamed to talk about loving themselves 50 years ago, now they're ashamed to say they don't love themselves.

They want to love themselves. There are several issues I want to talk about here about the biblical point of view on them. Self-esteem, self-love and self-image.

Let's talk first of all about self-esteem. What does the Bible say about self-esteem? Now, to esteem someone means you think highly of them. Right? So self-esteem means you think highly of yourself.

You think of yourself as a good person, right? That's what self-esteem is. I'm a good person. I'm no worse than most people.

I'm better than a lot of people. I deserve a little bit of congratulations. I, you know, we see this in advertising slogans.

It's another place where we see it in our culture. The lines you see in advertising where they say, you know, you owe it to yourself to have a good night's sleep on this mattress. You deserve the best, you know.

And this is what they always say appealing to the self-esteem of the listener. And it works because the listener has plenty of self-esteem. But what does the Bible say about myself? What does it say about self-esteem? In Luke 18, verses 10 through 14, Jesus said, Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.

The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector here. I fast twice a week. I give tithes of all I possess.

This is the example of positive self-esteem that Jesus gives. And the tax collector standing afar off, man, he had really bad self-esteem. He would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven.

He could not even look God in the face. He beat his breast in total agony and he said, God, be merciful to me, a sinner. Now, that guy had really low self-esteem.

He did not think he was a very good guy. And Jesus said, I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted.

So, one man came to church with high self-esteem. The other came to church with low self-esteem. And they both went home, but the one with low self-esteem went home justified in the sight of God.

The other one did not. He did not need any justification from God. He justified himself so much.

He did not need God to congratulate him. He was so self-congratulatory. That man had high self-esteem, but Jesus indicated he was the man who did not get saved because of his high self-esteem.

The other man, because he was not trying to pump his self-esteem, but just confessed, I am a wretch. I am a miserable sinner. That man went home justified and with the commendation of Christ.

The first beatitude, Matthew 5, verse 3, Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Poor in spirit means beggars in spirit. Those who have nothing to offer and know they have nothing to offer.

They are pensioners on the total generosity of another. That is what a beggar is. A beggar does not pay his own way.

Others pay his way. A beggar does not make any contributions. He has nothing to contribute.

He is the one to whom others contribute. That is what a beggar is. And that is what the word means in the Greek.

Blessed are the beggars in spirit. Those who know themselves to have nothing to offer. And those who know they are totally dependent on the grace of God and the mercy of God for everything.

That is what poor in spirit means. And Jesus said, Blessed are they. Happy are they.

Happy are those who do not have high self-esteem. Paul said in Romans 7, 18, I know that in me, that is in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing. In me, in my flesh there dwells no good thing.

Now, if we heard someone say that and we were not familiar with that verse in the Bible, wouldn't we be tempted to say, Well, let's see that, let me try to correct you out here. You have got way too low self-esteem here. No good thing? Oh, you have got all kinds of wonderful traits.

I am sure. Let me just try to interview you here and find out what kind of things we can say to encourage you and make you feel better about yourself. Well, the Bible does not encourage us to feel better about ourselves.

The Bible is about esteeming God, not esteeming me. My tendency already is to esteem me. I am born with that tendency.

I am born at the center of my universe as far as I am concerned. It is getting saved that changes that. And when I change, that means I deny myself.

Jesus said, If any man come after me, let him deny himself. And that does not just mean go through a rigorous course of self-inflicted pain and self-denial and flagellation like some of the monks did. What it means is that you deny your self-centeredness, the self-rule of your life.

You deny that. You put that aside. You say no to that and you replace that with something else, with following Jesus, with Him as your ruler.

Now Paul said, I know that in me that is in my flesh there dwells no good thing. Does that mean that we should go around thinking, well, I better not speak up at church because I have nothing good in me to say. What is the point of even going to church? I will probably just infect people with my own yuckiness and so forth.

I might as well just stay home and do everyone a favor. Well, actually there is a verse that I like to always put in juxtaposition with that one. It is in Philemon.

Philemon is a book with only one chapter, just before Hebrews. And Paul is praying for his friend Philemon. And he shares in verses 4 through 6 that he is praying for him.

He tells what he is praying. What his prayer is for Philemon in verse 6. Paul prays for Philemon that the sharing of your faith may become effective by the acknowledgment of every good thing which is in you. Some manuscripts say in us, but it doesn't change anything.

Every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus. Now, Paul has just spoken about the

need to acknowledge every good thing that is in you. And yet Paul said in Romans 7.18, I know that in me there is no good thing.

So, if in me there is no good thing, how can I acknowledge everything that is good in me? All the good things in me. Well, there are modifiers in those two statements. Paul said, I know that it is in me, in my flesh, he says, there dwells no good thing.

And he says, you need to acknowledge every good thing that is in you in Christ Jesus. You see, you exist on two planes. There is who you are in your flesh.

And there is who you are in Christ Jesus. Now, I don't even like to put it that way. Who I am in Christ Jesus.

Paul didn't say acknowledge who you are in Christ Jesus. He just acknowledged all the good things that are in you in Christ Jesus. God is good, not me.

God has put good things in me. I do have something to offer. I do have something to contribute.

Not because of who I am, but because in Christ Jesus, God has put good things in me to give to others. And same with you. And if you don't acknowledge that, the sharing of your faith will not become effective, as it says in Flehmen's Sick.

The effectiveness of your sharing with the body of Christ or with others, depends on your acknowledging that God has indeed gifted you in some valuable ways. But that's not self-esteem. That's Christ Jesus esteem.

Those are good things that are in you in Christ Jesus. In your flesh, there dwells no good thing. Now, the reason I backed away from that statement of who you are in Christ, is because that term has been used a great deal, in a sense, to kind of sanitize the culture of self.

There's a lot of Christians that are saying, okay, we don't want to talk about self-esteem, but we do need to know who we are in Christ. Who we are in Christ. Who we are in Christ.

Who we are in Christ. I think it's better for us to know who Christ is in us. The focus on who we are is the wrong focus.

The Bible nowhere tells us to think about who we are. The Bible does say, consider Him. Looking unto Him.

Meditating on Him. But it doesn't say, meditate on me. Think about me.

Appraise me. Estimate how good I am in Him. You see, a lot of the people who say, I just need to learn who I am in Jesus, they're just making a religious statement, but their real

orientation and focus of life is still who they are.

Who am I? If you say, who am I, and you want an answer, then your focus is on you. If you say, who is Jesus? Who is God? Then the focus is on Him, and that's the issue. Who I am is not really very important at all.

You might remember that Moses met God in the burning bush in the third chapter of Exodus. And God said, Moses, I'm going to send you now to Pharaoh to confront him and tell him to let the people go. And Moses said what? He said, who am I? That I should go and stand before Pharaoh.

And God didn't say, well, Moses, I'm sorry to hear you say that. It sounds like you've really had some deflation in your self-esteem. You used to feel pretty good about yourself.

Remember when you killed that Egyptian 40 years ago? You knew you were the guy then. How come you've lost your self-esteem? What happened to you? I didn't expect this 40 years tending sheep in the desert to make you so humble. No, God didn't say that.

God said, when Moses said, who am I? God didn't say, oh, well, Moses, who you are is my key guy. You need to know who you are in me. Who you are in me is a great guy.

Powerful in word and in deed, as the Bible says about Moses. You're going to do miracles. You've got great power and gifts.

You need to know who you are in me, Moses. No, he didn't say that. When Moses said, who am I to confront Pharaoh? God says, I will be with you.

It's as if he said, what's it matter who you are? It's who you're with. It's not who you are. It's who you're with.

He says, I will be with you. And that is God's answer to low self-esteem. You got low self-esteem? Good.

Hold on to that if you can. It's against nature. But maybe if you have enough grace, you can keep it for a long time.

It's a grace of humility that you need. You don't need to be told how great you are in Christ. God just wants you to know that he's with you.

And therefore, there are good things in you that he has put there. They don't accrue to your congratulations. They're nothing you did.

But it's just God did it. And he should have all the credit for it. In Job 42, you remember that this is at the end of the story of Job.

And he's been sick. And he's been trying to speculate why God let all these things happen to him and so forth. He even got to the place where he kind of complained against God a bit.

He boasted a little bit about how generous he used to be and how people used to respect him. And all the young men would stand up when he came down the street. And all the poor would rejoice because he gave them so much money and so forth.

All these fine things he said. And then God showed up. And he saw God.

And God talked to him for a while. And at the end of all that, Job said in verse 5 and 6 of Job 42, the last chapter of Job, Job said, I have heard of you by the hearing of the ear. But now my eye sees you.

Therefore, I abhor myself. And repent in dust and ashes. In the King James I think it says, I loathe myself.

Maybe it's not the King James. Some of the translations say, I loathe myself. Or, I abhor myself, the New King James says.

Now, that is not an attitude that most modern Christian teachers would encourage. Abhorring yourself. Loathing yourself.

But that's when Job got healed. Job got healed when he saw God and loathed himself. What the Christian church needs is to get its focus off of who I am, who you are, who any of us are, and needs to get a vision of God again.

And when we do, we will loathe ourselves. But that's a very healthy thing to do. I never have any spiritual problems when I loathe myself.

Well, my spiritual problems come and my relationship problems come when I think pretty well of myself. Now, it's one thing to grovel and act like you're really humble when you're not. If you loathe yourself, really what it means is you don't think yourself is very important, not worth thinking that much about.

Why should you think about yourself so much? Let's think about things more interesting. Let's think about things more important than me. And let's talk about self-love now.

What does the Bible teach about self-love? In Luke 9, 23, Jesus said, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. Every day, the Christian has to take up his cross and follow Jesus. This can only be done if we first deny ourselves.

Why? Because ourselves don't want to carry a cross. Ourselves don't want to follow Jesus. Ourselves want to follow our own interests.

We love ourselves and we want to please the one that we love. That's what love is, is it not? I mean, you always want to please the one you love. And we naturally love ourselves and want to please ourselves.

And Jesus said, No, I'm going to have you do something you don't want to do. It's not going to please you that much. It may please your father.

It won't please you. You've got to carry a cross. You've got to go where I'm going.

You've got to follow me. Now, in order to do that, you're going to have to deny yourself. And that means that basic, natural, instinctive commitment to self and love of self is going to have to be put aside.

You're going to have to die to that. In 2 Timothy chapter 3, in the first five verses, Paul talks about perilous times that will come. And he says, Know this, that in the last days perilous times will come, for men will be lovers of themselves.

And at the end of that he says, They have a form of godliness, but denying the power from such people turn away. If people love themselves, turn away from them. Don't hang out with them.

Self-love is not a good trait. It is listed with a whole bunch of other negative things in that passage. They'll be lovers of themselves.

They have a form of godliness, but they deny the power. They deny the power of godliness because they don't deny themselves. You've got to deny one or the other.

You either deny yourself or you deny God because both can't be Lord over your life. You can't be Lord over your own life and have God as Lord over your own life also. The power of godliness is that God becomes your Lord.

And His will becomes your passion and your concern. And His pleasure is all that you care about. You can't do that.

You can't have that attitude while you're still caring about yours. And so, those who love themselves deny the power of godliness. Those who follow Jesus don't love themselves.

They deny themselves. Well, how should we image ourselves? What about our self-image? Should it not be so that we recognize there are some good things about us? I mean, suppose you are better looking than most people. Or smarter.

Or more talented. Or more athletic. Or kinder.

Or more generous. More spiritually perceptive. Is that a possibility? Of course it's a possibility.



You might very well be some number of those things. There are people who are more talented than others. There are people who are more kind than others.

There are people who are more attractive than others. We acknowledge this. And if you happen to have some of those traits, is it some virtue to deny that this is so? I don't think so.

God never calls us to self-deception. That's another form of self-problems that people have. If you are superior to the average person in some trait, and that is entirely possible.

It could even be a spiritual trait. That is not necessarily grounds for having a high self-image. Paul said in Romans 12, 3, For I say through the grace given to me to everyone who is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think soberly, as God hath dealt to each one a measure of faith.

Now, if you have more faith than someone else, you might think, I've got a lot of faith. That poor sucker doesn't have very much faith at all. I'm obviously a better Christian than him.

I think well of myself. I'm a great man of faith and power. But Paul says, Wait a minute.

Think soberly about this, if you would. God is the one who has dealt you the measure of faith. What you have is a gift from God.

It's not yours. It's His. It doesn't accrue to any of your praise and glory.

It's to His praise and glory. When he says not, that a man should not think more highly of himself than he ought to think, he says, but he should instead think soberly. Now, what does soberly suggest? What is a person who is not sober? A person who is not sober is, well, drunk.

And what is one of the chief characteristics of a person who is drunk? Their perception is impaired. Is it not? Their sense of reality is impaired. They're a bit out of touch.

But a sober person is able to perceive things clearly and be in touch with reality. Now, Paul says, If you think more highly of yourself than you ought to think, then you're not in touch with reality. You need to think soberly.

And remember that it's God who gives everyone the measure of faith. If that's what you're proud of, your faith, or some result of your faith in your Christian life, realize that what you have is something God has given you, and you need to think more soberly than to think well of yourself about it. If you are born to a rich family, and therefore you have all kinds of things that other people don't have, other kids don't have, you know, it'd be ridiculous for you to congratulate yourself for it or give yourself the credit for it.

You didn't choose what family you'd be born in. Other kids have less because they were born in different families and the rich kid has more because he was born in a rich family. But while some people really esteem and highly regard riches and therefore think a rich person to be important, and many rich people think that about themselves.

That's why Paul said, Tell those who are rich not to be high-minded, in 1 Timothy 6, 17. Yet that child who's rich is rich because someone else made him rich. He didn't make himself rich.

And even if you made yourself rich, it's nothing to boast about. The reason you could make yourself rich is because you had opportunity, you had talent, you had intellect, you know, you had certain advantages. Now if you give yourself credit for those, one has to wonder why you should get any credit for any of those things.

Are you more intelligent than someone else? Who decided that you would be? Who gave you that? Did you give it to yourself? When you were in the womb, did you fill out an application and say, Hey, I'd like some of this and some of that, and this is what I'm going to get, and I'm going to demand it. You didn't have anything to say about it. That's all just God's grace.

And where is boasting then? It's excluded by grace. Paul said in Galatians 6, 3, If a man think himself to be something when he's nothing, he deceives himself. Now there's nothing wrong with recognizing that you have something that someone else doesn't have.

It might even be a desirable something. It might be something that most people would like to have, and you're the lucky one. You've got it and they don't.

You might have been born athletic. You might have been born musical. You might have been born handsome or beautiful or something, and, you know, the things that people are going to admire.

But so what? Does that make you a better person? It doesn't. Some of the most beautiful people in the world are some of the sleaziest. All you have to do is read People Magazine to figure that one out.

Some of the most intelligent are the most unhappy and immoral. There are things that people admire that aren't necessarily good in the sight of God. Remember, the things that are highly esteemed among men are an abomination to God, Jesus said.

And therefore, the thing that you have that others may admire, and when they comment on it and praise you for it and, you know, want to chum up with you because you have that and stuff and they really want to defer to you because of it, remember that they don't have God's values. And if you start thinking you're something because people think you're something, realize that the things that people esteem are an abomination to God.

And it may well be that indeed what you have is a gift of God and there may be some benefit that you can derive from it, but that benefit is to go to Him and the glory and the credit for it is to go to Him.

I have a quote here from A.W. Tozer from his book, *Man, the Dwelling Place of God*. He said, The victorious Christian neither exalts nor downgrades himself. His interests have shifted from self to Christ.

What he is no longer concerns him. He believes that he has been crucified with Christ. That is, it's no longer he that lives but Christ who lives in him.

So, what is my image of myself? My image of myself is somewhat irrelevant. Do I think I'm taller than most people? Yeah, I'm taller than probably most people in some cultures anyway. There'd be some tribes I'd be the shortest guy there and some teams.

But, you know, so what? I'm a little taller. That doesn't mean I'm a good person. It doesn't mean anything.

What's the point? It's irrelevant. You know, name some other traits and they're all irrelevant. Now, if you say, Well, but you're a better Christian than a lot of people are.

Even that is not as relevant to my self image as one might think because A. I'm not as good a Christian as people looking on probably think I am. And if people tell me I'm a good Christian, they don't know me as well as I do. And I know the ways in which I'm not as good a Christian as they might think I am.

And if I'm telling myself I'm a better Christian than other people, then the very fact I'm saying that means I'm not. Because a good Christian doesn't go around comparing himself favorably against other Christians saying I'm better than that person, I'm better than that person. That's pride.

That's ego. A good Christian doesn't spend much time thinking about himself at all. And it's not important to him what he is.

What's important is whether Christ is glorified in his life. And that's all that matters. As soon as he begins to congratulate himself for being a good Christian, Christ is not being glorified.

And he's in that moment not being a very good Christian. Now, there are several things I want to run through rather quickly here. I want to point out how the Scripture confronts the self concerns of the worldly person.

And the self concerns of the worldly person are my significance, my standing in comparison to others, my rights, my happiness, my needs, and in this day and age, my victimhood. These are all issues that non-Christian and Christian authors alike are trying

to get us to look into. You need to be aware of your significance, of your rights, your happiness.

You need to pursue your happiness. You need to be aware of your needs. You've got to get your needs met.

Your victimhood. You're a victim. Think about it.

Define yourself by it. Apply for entitlements because of it. You're a victim.

And that is not really the way the Bible instructs us to think. These self concerns are the very things that self denying requires that we put out of our minds. My significance.

John the Baptist, who is a pretty significant guy by Jesus' estimation. Jesus said, Among those born of women, there is not a risen one greater than John the Baptist. He was a pretty significant person.

But he said of himself in John 3.27, A man can receive nothing unless it has been given to him from heaven. Now, he was talking about himself and Jesus. He was talking about how his disciples were jealous because John used to be the powerful, popular, well-known guy doing all the baptizing and now people are all going to Jesus instead.

And so the disciples of John, who were a little jealous over this, come to John and say, Do you realize that he that you baptized across Jordan, he's over there and he's baptizing and everyone's going to him now? And that's when John said, Well, a man can receive nothing unless it's given to him from heaven. That is, I have what God wants me to have. He has what God wants him to have.

Who cares? Why should I be concerned about my significance? Why should it bother me that his church is getting bigger and my church is shrinking? That's an important thing for pastors, by the way. John the Baptist was an unusual minister in that respect because many pastors would get worried if their church is shrinking because their people are starting to go to another church in town. But John didn't mind.

He said, Well, what I have is what God wants me to have. What Jesus has is what God wants him to have. And then he said, of course, in verse 30, I, that he must increase.

Jesus must increase, but I must decrease. That is, of course, a statement of low self-significance. He was not concerned about his significance.

Jesus was more significant than he. And as far as he was concerned, it would be just as well if he himself kind of became more obscure and Jesus more prominent. Now you might say, Well, of course, because Jesus is Jesus and John and all the rest of us ought to think that about Jesus.

Right, exactly. Exactly. We should become more obscure and Jesus should become more

prominent as we grow and mature.

We don't become more self-significant, but less so. Paul said in 1 Corinthians 4, 7, Who makes you differ from another? Now he's talking about in ways that you might be proud of. You do differ from other people in some ways.

You've got more money. You've got more good looks. You've got more good health.

You've got more talent. Whatever. You're different from other people.

And some of those are things that people will look up to you about or that you might look up to yourself about. But Paul says, Who makes you differ from another? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it? In other words, why do you take credit for that which is really just a gift that you've given from someone else? Are you different from someone else? Who made you that way? Who made you differ from them? Are you a better Christian than them? Well, if you are, you wouldn't know it. But even if you are, it's because God has made you different.

God has given you more grace. He can give the same amount of grace to anyone else He wants to. For some reason, He's given more grace at the moment to some than to others and they do walk in greater victory or they have more faith or whatever and it's a blessing of God in their life.

If you've got it, recognize what it is. What about my standing in comparison with others? Promotion. Self-promotion.

Well, Paul said in Philippians 2.3, Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind. Let each esteem others better than himself. This is the only verse in the Bible that talks about self-esteem using that language.

It's got the word self and it's got the word esteem. Right? And you don't find those two words together in any Bible verse. So, if the Bible says anything about self-esteem, it's in this verse.

And Paul says, here's what you do. Let each person esteem others better than himself. What does that tell you about self-esteem? Not much.

It tells you that however much you esteem yourself, it should be less than you esteem others because you're supposed to esteem others better than yourself. Thomas Akempis in his book *The Imitation of Christ* wrote on this. He said, You should not reckon yourself better than others, lest perhaps in the eyes of God, who knows what is in man, you are considered worse.

Be not vain in your good works, because God's judgment is different oftentimes from

man's. And what is pleasing to one is displeasing to the other. If there is any good in yourself, believe that there is more in others, that you may preserve your humility.

It will not hurt you to put yourself under others, but it will be most hurtful to you to put yourself before others, even before one. The lowly have continual peace, but the heart of the proud is continually disturbed by jealousy and indignation. This man, of course, was a Catholic monk living several centuries ago.

But his book is just about the most read book in the world other than the Bible and Pilgrim's Progress. Thomas Akempis' book is the third most popular book in the world and read by Catholics and Protestants alike because it's so often been recognized that it does present the biblical teaching about many things and the teaching of self is one of them. I'll have another quote from Thomas Akempis later, but I want to talk to you about your attitude toward your rights.

The self-concerned person is concerned about his rights. What does the Bible tell me about my rights? Well, here's a passage that's pretty good on that. Luke 17, verses 7-10.

Jesus said, And which of you, having a servant plowing or tending sheep, will say to him when he has come in from the field, Come at once and sit down to eat. But will he not rather say to him, Prepare something for my supper, and gird yourself and serve me until I have eaten and drunk, and afterward you will eat and drink? Does he thank that servant because he did the things that were commanded him? I think not. So likewise you, when you have done all those things which you are commanded, say, We are unprofitable servants.

We have done only what was our duty to do. End quote. Now, what does that tell me about my rights? It tells me that I have to think of myself the way that a servant thinks of himself.

Now, does a servant have rights? Not this kind of servant. This is a slave. He's owned.

Paul said, You've been bought with a price. You're owned. You're not your own.

So what do you have to say about your rights? Not an awful lot. Now, Jesus is not telling us that this is the way people ought to treat their servants. He's giving an illustration from the way people do treat their servants.

This is how servants view their lot in life. They go out and work and tend sheep and tend the field all day long. They come in at the end of a hot day.

Their master's sitting there ready for dinner. The servant's ready for dinner too. But the servant doesn't get to sit down and eat and drink.

The servant has to now put on his chef's hat and cook up a meal for his master. And

once he's fed his master and the dinner cleanup's done, and the master's gone on to bed or to some other entertainment, then the servant can scratch out something for himself at the end of the day. When he comes in the door, the master doesn't say, Hey, thanks for being such a good servant.

Thanks for tending the sheep out there today. Oh, thanks for the meal here. The servant not only doesn't get thanked, he doesn't expect thanks.

Because he doesn't feel that he's done anything more than what his duty was to do. You don't get thanks for doing what is your duty. I mean, you may get thanks for that if people are very gracious and thankful to you, but they don't owe you thanks.

If you do only what is your responsibility to do, no thanks is owed. Now, this servant has no rights. He's worked hard, but he doesn't have the right to relax.

He has to work again until his master has nothing more for him to do. He doesn't even have the right to be thanked. Now, how many times have you been offended by somebody because they didn't thank you for something? Well, you must have felt you had the right to be thanked or else you would have been offended by being deprived of it.

Jesus indicated that's how our attitude toward our own rights and our own selves are to be. He says, When you've done everything that is commanded you, say, I'm a perfectly obedient child of God. No, he didn't say that.

If you've done everything that is commanded of you, you are a perfectly obedient child of God, but you should still be thinking, I'm an unprofitable servant. I've only done what I have to do. I've only done what I'm required to do.

There's no thanks, no rights, no special congratulations due to me. Now, when we read these verses, I wonder if we really believe them or if we just read them and say, Oh, yeah, I remember I read that before. That is a really striking verse, isn't it? That's interesting, isn't it? Now, next subject.

Or do we really say this is a defining verse for my life? I was just naive enough when I was young, when I read these verses to believe they really mattered. And I was fortunate that I read them when I was young and they mattered to me then because it's easier to set a course for your attitudes and opinions and so forth when you're young and you're not hardened in them than it is when you're older. But even older people have to be prepared to change.

But I remember when I was 16 and 17 reading these verses, I thought, yep, that's the way it's got to be. And that's what I've hoped and tried to maintain as my attitude toward my rights so that when someone doesn't give me what I would otherwise seem to deserve, instead of getting ruffled, the idea is to just say what Jesus said. I'm an

unprofitable servant.

I don't deserve more than what I'm getting. That's my view of my rights. Being a Christian calls me to give up my rights.

What about my happiness? Isn't everyone entitled to a little happiness? Shouldn't you seek happiness? Many times Christians even will justify Christians getting divorces and doing all kinds of bad things because they say, well, you know, they're entitled to a little happiness, aren't they? Well, are we? In Philippians 2, Paul said, Let each of you look out not for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. My own happiness, my own interests, my own gratification is not to be my concern. Paul said in Romans 15, We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak and not please ourselves.

He's talking in the context of limiting our freedoms so that we don't offend people who have a weak conscience. Well, but I have freedom. I have rights.

Shouldn't I demand my rights? No, I should not please myself. I shouldn't be seeking my own happiness. With reference to my needs, I have a quote here from Tony Walter, PhD in Sociology, in his book, *Need the New Religion*, by InterVarsity Press, a Christian book.

He says in the preface of that book, he says, It is fashionable to follow the view of some psychologists that the self is a bundle of needs and that personal growth is the business of progressively meeting these needs. Many Christians go along with such beliefs. One mark of the almost total success of this new morality is that the Christian church, traditionally keen on mortifying the deeds of the flesh, on crucifying the needs of the self in pursuit of the religious life, has eagerly adopted the language of need for itself.

And it's true. You'll hear Christians saying, you know, couples need to get away from the kids one day of the week, or else they'll go crazy. You know, wives have needs from their husbands that the husbands need to meet, and the husbands have needs from their wives that they need to meet.

Well, this may be true in some measure, depending on what we're calling needs. The only needs we really have ultimately are to survive, and that means we only need food, shelter, and clothing. But in order to perform certain things or reach other goals, there are other needs too.

If what I want is happiness, then I'll need a whole lot of support for that. There are a lot of things I'll need for that. I'll need just about everything I want.

And I'll need to make sure nothing is deprived of me because I get unhappy when I don't get what I want. That's not a need, however. It's only a need if the goal is to be happy all the time.

My goal is not to be happy. It cannot be. We're not to please ourselves and to seek our



own happiness, but God's and that of others.

And therefore, our needs should be blessedly few. In Matthew 6, verse 8, Jesus said, Therefore, do not be like the heathen, for your Father knows the things you have need of before you ask Him. In Matthew 6, verse 32, the same chapter, He said, He's talking about food and clothing.

He's talking about you have need of food and clothing. God knows it. He knows what you have need of before you ask Him.

The Gentiles are concerned about those things. You don't need to be concerned about those things. God, your Father, will be concerned for you on that.

You don't have to think about your needs. He'll take care of what you need. I can guarantee you, you will have everything you need until the day you die, by definition.

As soon as you don't have what you need, you'll be dead. Because you need a breath, you'll have one until you die. You need food, you'll have enough to keep you alive until you die.

As soon as you starve to death, you don't need any more food, you're dead. You got other needs now. God will provide all of your needs until the day you die.

You can count on that. They won't always be what you want, and you may die sooner than you'd prefer. But God will provide all your needs until you die.

And then after that, too. Different needs, but He'll provide your needs. You need to be concerned about what God wants and what God thinks you need, not what you do.

A lot of people think they need a lot of affirmation from other people or they need a lot of these... they have psychic needs and so forth. Well, depending on how we define need, I guess we could say we do need love. We do need affirmation if the goal is to be happy and affirmed.

But of course, God knows what we have need of and He'll give us everything we need. If we don't get it, then we don't need it. What we think we need, what we think we're deprived of, we don't need it if God hasn't given it.

Jesus said, Seek first the kingdom of God and all these other things will be added to you. If you're seeking first the kingdom of God, anything you don't have, you don't need. And it's good to redefine our needs rather than, you know, decide that God hasn't come through or that some of our needs are being deprived.

In Philippians 4, 11-13, Paul said, Not that I speak in regard to need. Now, he was in prison in Rome when he wrote this. For I have learned in whatever state I am to be content.

I know how to be abased. I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry.

Both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Do you have needs that you're suffering for lack of? Paul said, I've learned how to suffer need.

I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. If I don't have my needs met, as long as I have Christ, I have the strength and I don't have anything to complain about. Paul defined our needs in 1 Timothy 6.8. He says, Having food and clothing, with these we shall be content.

In other words, these are the needs we'll recognize. These are our genuine needs. And if we have these things, we'll be content with those.

Everything else is luxury. What about this business of victimhood? It might seem strange to throw that one in there with my rights and my needs and my happiness and so forth. My victimhood? Well, yeah.

Because lots of the psychological teaching that's coming to the church has to do with the need to recognize your victimhood and deal with your victimhood. Well, are we victims or are we not victims? Yeah, we're all victims of something. Has anyone ever been wronged by anybody ever? Well, then you're a victim, right? It doesn't matter.

Anyone disadvantaged in any way vis-a-vis some other people? Yeah, of course. There's a lot of people who don't have as many advantages as other people. Everybody's a victim of something.

Does that matter? It shouldn't to me. Now, if you're a victim of some injustice, your victimhood should matter to me. I should be concerned about your victimhood.

My victimhood shouldn't matter to me because I'm dead to me, supposedly. I'm supposed to die to myself. It's supposed to not be a problem.

Jesus was a victim of injustice. Paul was a victim of injustice. They didn't let that ruin their peace or their happiness or their spiritual faithfulness.

Larry Crabb, a Christian psychologist, in a book he wrote called Inside Out, a Christian book, said, and I don't agree with him here, but this is the world's view of it, expressed by a Christian author, and he did agree with the world on this. He says, Before we'll see how sinful we are as a self-protective agent, we must first feel how disappointed we are as a vulnerable victim. In other words, before we can really acknowledge our sinfulness, we have to deal with our victimhood.

Before we'll see how sinful we are, we have to deal with the fact that we're disappointed

as vulnerable victims. So, I need to define myself as a victim before I can define myself as a sinner, as a perpetrator. Now, everybody in the world is a victim of something, and everyone in the world is a perpetrator.

You have perpetrated injustice against others, and others have perpetrated injustice against you. What Larry Crabb is saying is, before you can really see yourself as the perpetrator, the sinful self that you are, you need to recognize yourself as the victim of other people's perpetrated injustice against you. That's what the Bible says.

The Bible indicates that if I have been victimized by others, that's their problem. If you perpetrate evil against me, that's your problem. You know why? Because God said, Vengeance is mine.

I will repay. You've got big problems. Because I'm not going to avenge myself.

And if you victimize me, all I can do is feel sorry for you. Because I'm not going to avenge myself. And that means God's going to avenge me someday if it needs to be done.

If it doesn't, then God won't. That's fine. But, I don't have to worry about being a victim.

I need to worry about my spiritual mentality, about what you do to me. And if I die to myself, it won't hurt me spiritually to be victimized by other people. My concern, according to Scripture, is to make sure that I'm not victimizing others.

I need to first be concerned about my identity as a sinner. And not even concerned very much at all about my identity as a victim. But Larry Crabb and other Christian authors think, well, you can't really deal with how sinful you are until you deal with how much a victim you are.

Well, that's essentially saying, you've got to define yourself more in terms of what others have done to you than in terms of what you've done to others and to God. That is not biblical after all. Ezra chapter 9 and verse 13.

Ezra makes this observation as he's praying. He says, And after all that has come upon us for our evil deeds and for our great guilt, since you, our God, have punished us less than our iniquities deserve. We're not victims.

We've suffered a great deal, but we've suffered much less than we deserve. If you treat me badly, I might say, well, you oughtn't to do that. But I can't say I've gotten worse than what I deserve.

What do I deserve? If I got exactly what I deserve, I'd go to hell. I'm very fortunate. I'm not a victim in the sense of someone to be pitied.

I'm going to heaven. And if people abused me every day of my life between now and

then, I'm still going to heaven. I'm not someone to be pitied.

I'm getting less than what I really deserve. I deserve to go to hell. I deserve to be hated.

I deserve to be abused. Because I've done those things that the Bible says are worthy of death. And I deserve to die.

And here I am alive. I'm getting better than what I deserve. God has punished me less than what I deserve.

Whatever anyone else does to me. And I've had some people treat me badly. Not as many as ought to probably.

But I've never really felt that I've gotten worse than what I deserve. The opposite is true. Thomas Akempis in his book *Of the Imitation of Christ Again* had this prayer.

Quote, O Lord, if I rightly saw myself, I could not say that any person had ever unjustly treated me. And therefore, I cannot justly complain before Thee. But because I have frequently and grievously sinned against Thee, every creature, that is every created person, may rightly take arms against me.

To me, therefore, is justly due confusion of face and contempt. But to Thee, praise, honor, power, and glory. And unless I am ready and gladly willing to be despised and forsaken by all creatures and to be regarded as altogether nothing, I cannot be inwardly at peace nor gain strength and spiritual illumination nor be fully united to Thee.

Unquote. Now, I don't know if you recognize it, but most of the lines in that were excerpted from passages of the Bible. This is a fully biblical attitude that he expresses here.

Different than what the world teaches us and what even the mainstream church teaches us. But certainly, it's radically Christian and radically different than the world's view on this. I've included at the end of your notes just this little thing.

I almost call it a poem, but it doesn't rhyme. I first saw this years and years ago when I was a teenager. And I liked it.

And then I lost track of it and thought I'd never find it again. Then I saw it again, actually, at a Christian house. And I thought, oh, I ought to Xerox that.

But I never did. I lost it again. And then years later, I saw it in a Christian magazine.

I thought, I'm not going to lose it this time. I pulled it out. And this is called *Dying to Self*.

The author is unknown. But I've always thought that this basically summarizes very well what the Christian attitude towards self is. And I'll just close by reading that.

It's in very small print in the bottom of your notes. It says, When you are forgotten or neglected or purposely said it not, and you don't sting and hurt with the insult or the oversight, but your heart is happy, being counted worthy to suffer for Christ, that is dying to self. When your good is evil spoken of, when your wishes are crossed, your advice disregarded, your opinions ridiculed, and you refuse to let anger rise in your heart or even defend yourself, but take it all in patient, loving silence, that is dying to self.

When you lovingly and patiently bear any disorder, any irregularity, any impunctuality, any annoyance, when you can be content with any food, any offering, any raiment, any climate, any society, any solitude, any interruption by the will of God, that is dying to self. When you never care to refer to yourself in conversation or to record your own good works or itch after commendation, when you can truly love to be unknown, that is dying to self. When you can see your brother prosper and have his needs met, and can honestly rejoice with him in spirit and feel no envy nor question God while your own needs are far greater and in desperate circumstances, that is dying to self.

When you can receive correction and reproof from one of less stature than yourself and can humbly submit, inwardly as well as outwardly, finding no rebellion or resentment rising up within your heart, that is dying to self. How many of you have died to self? Dying to self isn't something you do one time. Dying to self is something that you do repeatedly, probably many times a day, as you recall what the Scripture says about you and your position vis-à-vis God and the rest of the world.

And dying to self is the right thing to do. You might say, well, that seems like doormat theology. I've lost track of the number of preachers who tell us that we don't want to be doormats.

It's especially found in books to wives. You don't want to be a doormat. In other words, you don't want your husband to walk all over you.

Well, that's true. No one really wants to be a doormat. Collect a lot of dirt and stuff.

But it's really the case that we're supposed to be like Jesus. And Jesus, you know, when He suffered, He threatened not. When He reviled, He reviled not again.

He committed Himself to Him that judges righteously. To remember Him and what He said and taught will cause you to look an awful lot like a doormat to others, but actually, you'll be the happiest person in the crowd. Because the unhappiest person is the person who is always itching after having himself noticed, himself stroked, himself deferred to, himself pleased.

And, you know, when a person is addicted to self like that, they're going to be disappointed a lot. Because you're not going to always have the world catering to you like that. If you reach the point where you die to self and all you want is God's will and

say, well, whatever God wants is what I want.

And you really get to that place. And that's where you're supposed to be all the time. That's a happy place.

That's, as Thomas A. Kempis said, a place where there's perfect peace. Because if you've died to your own desires, you can't very well be disappointed. And you can't very well feel cheated and victimized and angry and so forth.

And so, it's important for us to not flow with not only the dominant culture, but the dominant Christian teaching in our day. We need to look back to the source, the root of our faith, which is Christ Himself and the Apostles and follow their teachings on these matters. It will certainly set us apart from the world and from much of the church as well.