

JACK'S CORNER

QUESTION: “Self-esteem” is one of those educational buzzwords that I hear often. How concerned should Christian parents be about their child’s self-esteem?

ANSWER: You should be more concerned with your child’s “Christ-esteem.” We hear a lot these days about the importance of self-esteem. Many modern thinkers have blamed poor self-esteem for everything from crime to depression. If you’re over 65 like me, you probably had parents who were hardly concerned about your self-esteem. They wanted you to do the right thing, work hard, and accomplish something worthwhile in life. They believed that self-esteem was earned, not just given to everyone who breathes. **Self-esteem came along as part of the package when one did the right thing, worked hard, and accomplished something worthwhile.**

I believe it is a mistake to heap praise and rewards on children (just because they exist and are yours) without requiring accomplishment, dedication, sacrifice, and follow-through. I also believe our focus on self-esteem is misdirected and over-emphasized.

As Christians, what kind of self-image do you suppose God wants us to have? Does he think a great self-esteem is necessary to do what he commands? What do you remember Jesus saying about “self”? Most of his comments had to do with “denying self” and following him. As Christians, there is always tension whenever we look deeply inside of ourselves. On the one hand, we are justified by our faith, declared righteous, washed clean by the blood of Christ, made in the image of God, and loved so much by God that he sent his only Son to die for us! Should we feel valuable? Important? Pleased with who we are, and how God made us? Of course!

On the other hand, (and here’s the tension) we still struggle with sin, hideous thoughts and words and actions come out of us, nothing good dwells within our flesh, we try to do what is right but we cannot do it (see RM 7), we need continuous forgiveness, and moment by moment we battle the “flesh” in a spiritual war.

As Christians, the focus of self-esteem is misdirected. It is not that we are so worthwhile, but that God is so good. It is not that we are so valuable, but that God is so holy. We exist to esteem Christ. Unpopular, I know. Not in keeping with today's psychological thought, I know.

What if we could help our children get to a point in their relationship with God where the self-esteem question really wasn't important any longer? What if, like Jesus, we could help our children honestly say: "I want to glorify the Father"? What if we could focus on helping our children follow MT 16:24, MK 8:34, and LK 9:23 (deny yourself, take up your cross and follow me)? What if we could help our children become so lost in the wonder of God's grace and forgiveness, so interested and committed to following Him, that the word "self" slipped unnoticed from their hearts and minds?

Maybe if WE could move more in that direction, our children would follow.

Jack Lipski, M.A.
Christian Counselor

(Permission to copy granted for personal use only.)