

**DEVELOPING A BIBLICAL SELF-IMAGE  
IN OUR STUDENTS**

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**Pastor Silas Krueger  
Carlsbad, California**

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## INTRODUCTION

"Jimmy doesn't have a very good self-image. I'm not sure why, but he's never had much self-esteem."

"The problem with Sue is that she doesn't think very much of herself. We've told her again and again how pretty she is and and that we think she's very talented, but she can't seem to accept that. And that's caused a lot of her problems, because if you can't love yourself, you certainly can't love anyone else."

Those conversations are not imaginary. Nor are they unusual. Anyone who works with people, as you and I do, hears conversations very similar to that almost every week. People today are concerned about "self-esteem." This is especially true of parents if they feel one of their children has low self-esteem.

The frequent references to "self-esteem" in daily conversations show how prevalent this concept has become in the last few years. The whole self-esteem movement is one of the most powerful and pervasive in our culture. What began as a psychological theory has permeated most areas of modern life, including the educational world.

What is our reaction as Christians to the self-esteem movement? How does the basic concept of self-worth accord with what the Bible has to say about the way we are to view ourselves? What place does the self-esteem approach have in your work as educators? Should you be spending more time working on the self-image of your students, particularly in trying to improve how they feel about themselves?

These are the kinds of questions we will touch on in this paper. We will start with a brief overview of the origins of the self-esteem movement. We will then note the acceptance that the self-esteem movement has gained in the church, including evangelical circles. Our third section will give an evaluation of the self-worth concept in the light of sacred Scripture. In our fourth section we will focus on the question of whether there is a command in Scripture to love ourselves. We will conclude the paper by considering some scriptural guidelines for developing a proper self-image in our students.

### I. THE ORIGIN OF THE SELF-ESTEEM MOVEMENT

When and where did the self-esteem movement begin? That is the first question we want to consider in our study, for knowing the source of an idea or approach will often help us understand its nature better.

Most of us here probably think of the self-esteem movement as a relatively recent development. Even the terms, such as "self-esteem," "self-worth" or "self-image," are rather new to our vocabulary. Fifteen years ago they were not the current jar-

gon--certainly not to the extent they are today. And most of the literature from and about this psychological approach has appeared in the last decade. In evangelical circles, for example, there are very few articles on the subject from the '70's.

The roots of self-love can actually be traced back to the previous century. Calvin Hall and Gardner Lindzey, in their work, "Theories of Personality," offer the following opinion regarding the origin of self-theory:

"William James, in his famous chapter on the self in 'Principles of Psychology,' 1890, chapter 10, set the stage for contemporary theorizing, and much of what is written today about the self and the ego derives directly or indirectly from James." (1)

In the chapter Hall and Lindzey cited, James raised many of the questions and concerns that later became central in the development of self-theory.

Nor is Hall and Lindzey's assessment an isolated one. L. Edward Wells and Gerald Marwell support that opinion in their joint work on self-esteem. They observe:

"William James is generally identified as the earliest self-psychologist, and his writings are still standard reference for developmental discussions on self-esteem. James' early discussion is still considered definitive." (2)

If we are to find a specific, generally recognized source for the self-love movement, then, it seems that the best place to look is in the writings of William James, the nineteenth-century philosopher and psychologist.

We should not assume, however, that there is a straight line of development between James and the modern self-esteem movement. For one thing, James did not make broad, speculative statements that he felt should be accepted as the norm for all people. Rather, he openly acknowledged that for many of his findings he used nothing more objective than his own self-awareness. What is more, James also distinguished between self-feelings, self-love and self-estimation and did not accept all three categories with the lack of discrimination that we so often see among psychologists today.

In his work entitled, "Psychology: Briefer Course," James noted that we human beings not only have a relationship with others in the world around us, but also with ourselves. As James put it: "Whatever I may be thinking of, I am always at the same time more or less aware of myself, of my personal existence." (3) Much of James' work was spent considering the question, "In what ways do I relate to myself as a person?"

In considering how we relate to ourselves, James developed

three "self" categories: self-feelings, self-love and self-estimation. He noted that in the first category, self-feelings, the way we feel about ourselves may be either positive or negative, that is, a person can feel either good or bad about himself. One of the synonyms that James used for positive self-feelings was self-esteem, which is now widely used in both secular and evangelical self-love literature. We should also note that James used that term, self-esteem, in a very narrow or restricted sense, to delineate only one-half of one of his three categories. Today, by contrast, psychologists usually include all three of James' categories under that one term.

James stated that self-feelings come through a combination of natural inclination and performance. A person may be born with a positive self-orientation, for example, but through a series of failures those positive self-feelings may decline. But James also felt that the reverse is true and that a person who is inclined to feeling negatively about himself could become much more positive through a series of successes. Self-love, according to James, is not so much a feeling, as we might think at first, but an action. By self-love James meant those things that a person does because by nature he is motivated to seek his best interests. The third category in personality that James saw was self-estimation, which means the ability to take an objective inventory of oneself and one's capacities. James felt that self-estimation, like the other two categories, could operate independently. You can see that you are successful, for example, but you may still have negative self-feelings.

William James was content to record his observations about the self. He did not formulate a psychological approach based on his observations. One of those whose theories of the self did lead to a practical methodology is Eric Fromm.

Eric Fromm was born in Germany in 1900 and received his education there, including his training as a Freudian psychologist. He emigrated to America in 1933, about which time he also broke with the Freudian school. Fromm rejected Freud's emphasis on the biological nature of man, and he especially disputed Freud's inclusion of aggression (which Freud termed "the death instinct"), as a basic part of human nature.

According to Fromm, society is the determinant in the formation of human personality. Since Fromm is a humanist, he believes that man is naturally and intrinsically good. The evil we find in man, in Fromm's view, comes not from man himself, but from society, especially when society causes the self to deny its potential for growth and expression. In other words, outside forces and agencies are what turn man bad, particularly when they become repressive and frustrate man's natural tendencies.

As you might expect of a humanist, Fromm feels that man has

the right to be proud of his accomplishments, especially of the material world he has created. Fromm feels so strongly about this, as a matter of fact, that he writes:

"The character structure of the mature and integrated personality constitutes the source and basis of 'virtue;' and . . . 'vice,' in the last analysis, is in-difference to one's self and self-mutilation." (4)

The focus of man, then, should be inward, and if it isn't, then there is something deficient in man's personality.

Fromm, who has written a great deal on the subject of love, feels that love is not transcendent. It does not transcend man, nor does it descend on him from above. Rather, Fromm feels that love "is something inherent and radiating from within him." (5) Fromm is so optimistic about the nature of man, including his desire or inclination to express himself in love, that he says, "Man is able to know what is good and to act accordingly." (6)

Those who have done much reading in Fromm know that he does not take a very high view of Christianity. He characterizes Christian beliefs, such as the Trinity, as "authoritative" and "regressive." In other words, Fromm believes that Christianity is an agency that would tend to deny man's natural tendencies toward growth and fulfillment. Fromm would not have us look to Christianity to find God, but to man himself. Man is god in Fromm's theory; and if the sacred exists, its center is in the self.

It should be clear that Fromm's contribution to self-theory is that he made the self central in his approach. Fromm's book, "Man for Himself," gives psychological expression to the humanist's belief in the centrality of man.

The approach that Fromm adopted received support from the writings of Rollo May, who was born in 1909. After receiving his undergraduate education in the Midwest, May studied theology at Union Theological Seminary in New York and then received a Ph. D. at Columbia Teachers College across the street.

Mays' contribution to self-theory is that he brought in the influence of existentialism, which he encountered in his psycho-therapeutic studies in Vienna. The central concept of existentialism is what the Germans call "Dasein" ("existence" or "being there"). By this they mean the intense, fundamental awareness of one's existence. (Existentialists, by the way, do not make a distinction between the knowing and the known, between the subject that is doing the experiencing and the object that is being experienced. Part of the "existential experience" is bringing about a unity between subject and object so that they become inseparable.)

Existentialists such as May recognize three aspects to their

world: the "world around" or the environment; the "world with" or our life with others; and the "own world," that is, the world of the self and one's relationship to one's self. This last world is central for the existentialists, and the most important goal for the self is "becoming," that is, going through the process of self-development or fulfilling one's potential.

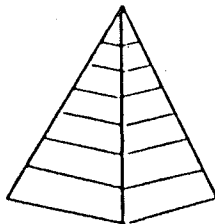
In May's theory the central contribution of psychology or counseling is to assist the process of "becoming." His existential therapy starts with the isolated self, which is aware of its basic existence, but which is also confronted by non-existence and the associated emotion of dread. The therapist's responsibility, according to May, is two-fold: He is to accept and value the individual with whom he is working, without making any judgments or decisions for him; and he is to encourage the individual to commit himself to self-defined decisions that will help him reach his potential.

It is not difficult to see that Christianity is not compatible with May's existential approach. May does not accept or encourage outside intrusions, particularly when those "intrusions" make judgments on a client or lead him to certain decisions, rather than allowing him to arrive at his own.

One of the first to formulate a psychological approach based on the self-theories we have been discussing was Abraham Maslow, who was born in 1908 and educated at the University of Wisconsin. Maslow then moved east and spent his early academic years teaching at Columbia Teachers College and Brooklyn College.

Maslow postulates a theory of human personality that is based on what he terms "a hierarchy of needs." These needs, he says, are innate, part of us from the day we are born. He also feels that the needs must be met in a relatively fixed order: first, physiological needs and safety needs; then, belonging and love needs; next, self-esteem and status needs; and finally, self-realization or self-actualization needs.

Maslow's hierarchy of needs could be diagrammed as follows:



- 7 Self-Realization
- 6 Status
- 5 Self-Esteem
- 4 Love
- 3 Belonging
- 2 Safety
- 1 Physiological

At the very top of the pyramid is self-actualization, which is the last need to be met and which does not emerge, in Maslow's theory, until all the other needs are met. This is important, for among the characteristics of the self-actualized person is acceptance of self and others. Maslow feels, then, that we can't

really accept others until all our other needs are met. We must first be loved and have self-esteem, yes, even status, or it will be impossible for us to love and accept others.

Maslow describes the person who has emerged at the top of the pyramid with these words:

"A few centuries ago these (self-actualized people) would all have been described as men who walk in the path of God or as godly men. A few say that they believe in God, but describe this God more as a metaphysical concept than as a personal figure. If religion is defined only in social-behavioral terms, then these are all religious people, the atheist included. But if more conservatively we use the term religion so as to include and stress the supernatural element and institutional orthodoxy (certainly the more common usage) then our answer must be quite different, for then almost none of them is religious." (7)

Maslow's theory needs no comment from the Christian perspective, for he has made the matter very clear himself. He freely acknowledges that his theory of personality, especially his emphasis on self-actualization, does not accord with orthodoxy.

One of the most popular and influential of the self-psychologists is Carl Rogers, who was born in the Midwest in 1902 to a conservative Protestant family. After graduating from the University of Wisconsin, Rogers switched to ministerial studies and attended Union Theological Seminary in New York. The liberal theology he learned at Union did not satisfy him, so he broke with Christianity after a trip abroad. He transferred to the teachers college at Columbia, where he was strongly influenced by John Dewey, and received his Ph. D. in 1928.

Rogers characterizes his counseling technique as "non-directive" or "client-centered." The counselor makes himself open and transparent to the client and accepts the client "just as he is," without making judgments. Then he helps the client understand aspects of himself he previously repressed; and he facilitates the client unleashing his own resources within to "be more self-directing and self-confident." (8)

There are no absolutes in Rogers' approach, which means no judgments are made about the "rightness" or "wrongness" of any feelings. Rogers feels that "the more significant continuum is from fixity to changiness, from rigid structure to flow, from stasis to process." (9)

The counselor's purpose in Rogers' approach is to lead the client to the highest of seven stages. The first stage is when a person is "fixed," "static," "completely blocked," with little a-

wareness of his feelings, let alone the acceptance of them. The seventh or highest stage is when "feeling and cognition interpenetrate, self is subjectively in the experience (the client is undergoing), volition is simply the subjective following of a harmonious balance of organismic direction." (10)

As a humanist Rogers feels that the proper focus of man is man. He also affirms that people have the resources within themselves to affect any changes that are necessary to becoming an integrated person.

## II. ACCEPTANCE OF SELF-THEORY IN EVANGELICAL CIRCLES

The origin of the self-theory was not, as we saw, within the church, but you would not know that if you were to judge by the welcome some in the church have given to this movement. The church has, in some respects, been one of the strongest supporters of the self-worth concept.

One of the first to embrace the ideals of self-esteem was Robert Schuller, whom most of us know from "The Hour of Power" which he televises from the Crystal Cathedral in Garden Grove each Sunday. In 1969, before many were even aware of the self-esteem movement, Schuller authored a book with the title, "Self-Love: The Dynamic Force of Success." (As you might expect, this book had a laudatory introduction by Norman Vincent Peale, Schuller's mentor and predecessor in embracing self-theory before it had its present titles.)

In chapter two, which has the catchy title, "Self-Love--High Hat or Halo?" Schuller defines self-love in a way that is almost indistinguishable from the self-theorists we considered previously. He says there:

"Self-love is a crowning sense of self-worth. It is an ennobling emotion of self-respect. It is a divine awareness of personal dignity. It is what the Greeks call reverence for the self. It is an abiding faith in yourself. It is sincere belief in yourself. It comes through self-discovery, self-discipline, self-forgiveness and self-acceptance. It produces self-reliance, self-confidence and an inner security, calm as the night." (11)

Later in the book, in a chapter entitled, "Love Yourself," Schuller speaks of self-love in words that seem to echo Fromm, Maslow and company. He writes:

"Love yourself or you will die spiritually. If you do not love yourself, you cannot love your neighbor. If you do not love people, you will not be able to love God. God lives in people. If you do not love yourself and do not love people and do not love God, you are a dead man who is walking, sexing, sleeping, working, breathing, eating, excreting." (12)



Schuller clearly accepts the concept that self-love is a prerequisite to loving others, yes, to loving God Himself.

About thirteen years later Schuller reaffirmed his faith in the self-love movement in a book he sent free to most pastors in the United States. In that book, with the title, "Self-Esteem: The New Reformation," Schuller states:

"I contend that this unfulfilled need for self-esteem underlies every human act, both negative and positive. Every analysis of social or personal sins must recognize that the core of all sinful or unsocial behavior is a conscious or subconscious attempt to feed the person's need for self-esteem." (13)

It almost seems as if Schuller had Maslow's hierarchy of needs in front of him as he penned those words.

Schuller is not alone in his endorsement of the self-love theory. Let us briefly consider some others in order to show how widely the self-worth movement has taken hold in the church.

Anthony Hoekema, a professor of systematic theology at Calvin Theological Seminary in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has written a number of excellent books on such topics as speaking in tongues, the so-called Holy Spirit baptism and the four major cults. Many of our pastors have Hoekema's works in their libraries and recommend them.

In "A Christian Looks at Himself" Hoekema makes several statements which are a ringing endorsement of the self-esteem movement. For example, in discussing the effects of the fall into sin on man Hoekema asks:

"Does this mean that man now became of no worth? Nothing could be further from the truth. Even after the fall man was still considered to be a creature of infinite worth. Jesus said that one human life is worth more than the whole world (Matt. 16:26). The Scriptures also affirm that even a fallen man still bears the image of God (Gen. 9:6; James 3:9)." (14)

Hoekema is saying that neither the fall into sin nor the effect of sin after the fall has changed man's value in the eyes of God. He feels that because we were created in God's image, we have a dignity and a worth that provide a basis for self-love and for acceptance by God.

Hoekema also resists any suggestion that man has no worth apart from the restoring grace of God. In "The Christian Looks at Himself" Hoekema discusses some changes that have been made in the hymn, "Beneath the Cross of Jesus." He obviously feels these changes are for the better, for he states:

"Fortunately, in the hymnal presently used in our church the last line has been changed (from 'my own worthlessness') to 'And my unworthiness.' I quite agree that we

are unworthy; I do not believe that it accords with the biblical teaching to say that we are worthless."

(15)

To see just what Hoekema means by this, observe that he also criticizes Issac Watts' "Alas, and Did My Savior Bleed?" which is one of our Lenten hymns. Hoekema objects to the fact that this hymn speaks of "a worm such as I." He feels that this "hymn could convey to many people a quite unflattering self-image."

(16)

Another evangelical writer who blows the self-love trumpet is Walter Trobisch. Although Trobisch is an Austrian pastor, he has exerted a considerable influence in our country through his writings on marriage. A number of pastors in our circles recommend his book, "I Married You," to unmarried couples who are struggling with the temptation of intimacy and to couples contemplating marriage.

Trobisch's writings haven't been confined to sexuality and marriage. In a work called, "Love Yourself," Trobisch says that self-esteem needs must be met before we can expect a person to love others. In words that could have come from the pen of Maslow or Schuller he says:

"We cannot give what we do not possess. Only when we have accepted ourselves can we become truly self-less and free from ourselves." (17)

Nor is Trobisch giving us the Christian ideal of selflessness in that quotation. Earlier he had made it clear how he understands "accepting ourselves" when he wrote: "Without self-love there can be no love for others." (18)

There are other, popular evangelical writers, such as Bruce Narramore, whom we could quote to show how widely the self-love theory has been accepted in the church. We do not want to belabor the point. We trust, however, that you will see how widely the self-esteem movement has been accepted in the mainline and evangelical churches, not just in those on "the fringe." In fact, evangelical churches seem to be in the vanguard when it comes to promoting the importance of self-love or self-esteem.

Before we leave this section we feel constrained to quote one of the most popular Christian psychologists of our day, James Dobson. Dr. Dobson's impact on the church at large, including our church, has been tremendous, almost immeasurable. Many of our congregations have shown his "Focus on the Family" film series; more of our members than we know are regular listeners to his radio broadcasts and recipients of his newsletter; and his books are on most of our bookshelves. We would be remiss, therefore, if we did not take note of how Dobson has responded to the self-worth theory.

We can say, in a word, that Dobson has endorsed it. Consid-

er his book, "Hide or Seek, which has the subtitle, "Self-Esteem for the Child, A Compelling Approach for Parents and Teachers." The basic premise of this book is that the root cause for most of man's problem is a feeling of inferiority or inadequacy, lack of self-esteem or personal worth. In chapter four, entitled, "Strategies for Esteem," Dobson presents ten different methods for developing what he considers to be a right self-esteem. Among other things, Dobson suggests that children should develop a skill that makes them stand head and shoulders above other people. In other words, he suggests that a person will grow in his feelings of self-worth as he becomes convinced he compares favorably with others or is even superior to them. (19)

In pointing out Dobson's acceptance of the self-esteem theory, I am not trying to dispute or reject everything he says. There is much in Dobson that is both biblical and practical. He also has a winsome way of presenting his case. At the same time, we would be less than honest if we did not show that Dobson is frequently indistinguishable from the secular, self-love psychologists. For example, in his widely read Dare to Discipline, he says:

"The most magnificent theory ever devised for control of behavior is called the 'Law of Reinforcement,' formulated many years ago by the first education psychologist, E. L. Thorndike. It is magnificent because it works!" (20)

Dobson acknowledges the secular origins of behaviorism. In fact, he goes on to say that Thorndike's original law had been honed to a fine edge by B. F. Skinner. But he still recommends that people accept this methodology "because it works!" In other words, James Dobson is quite comfortable with the self-esteem movement and its methodologies.

### III. A SCRIPTURAL EVALUATION OF THE SELF-ESTEEM MOVEMENT

How do we Christians respond to the self-esteem movement? There is no denying its popularity or its impact, as we have seen. But popularity and impact are not, in themselves, valid reasons for adopting an approach when it comes to serving the people of God. Any method we adopt must stand the test of Scripture. Paul reminds us of that when he says we are to "bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ" (II Cor. 10:5). Any approach we employ must be in harmony with the revelation that God has given us in Christ.

Does the self-esteem movement as it is generally understood conform to Scripture? Is this movement, which says, "If you don't love yourself, you can't love anyone else," compatible with what God reveals in His Word? That is the question to which we now want to turn our attention.

As our starting point, let us consider briefly what Paul says in his second letter to Timothy. In this letter, which has

been called Paul's last will and testament, the aged apostle discusses "the last days" with his young friend. He wants Timothy to know what those days will be like, what will take place in them and how he should contend with what he encounters. In this discussion Paul says: "But know this, that in the last days perilous times will come. For men will be lovers of themselves" (I Tim. 3:1,2).

Did you notice that? Paul says that one of the distinguishing marks of society in the last days is that people will be "lovers of themselves." The word Paul uses in the original is *philautoi*, a compound word made from *philia*, which means "love" in the friendship sense, and *autos*, which means "self." Those who are "lovers of themselves" do not exhibit the agape-love which we learn only from God. Agape-love is the highest kind of love in Scripture, for it is the love Jesus pours into our hearts when His Spirit brings us to faith. Agape-love is the love that moves us to offer ourselves in service to one another, as Jesus first offered Himself for us. But that is not the love that will characterize people in the last days. Rather, they will show *philia*-love, which is a lower type of love than agape-love. They will have only the natural human affection--and it will be directed toward themselves!

Is the *philia*-love of self that Paul discusses in II Timothy the same as the self-love of modern psychology? If it is, then Paul's injunction to turn away from such people (3:5) would apply to the modern self-esteem movement.

To answer the question about equating the self-love of today with the *philia*-love against which Paul warns, we consider two definitions. Consider, on the one hand, how Arndt and Gingrich, in their authoritative New Testament lexicon, define *philia*. They define it as "friendship; love; friendship with pagans." (21) Alongside that definition consider the description of self-love offered by Carl Rogers. He says: "In general, positive regard (his term for self-love) is defined as including such attitudes as warmth, liking, respect, sympathy, acceptance." (22)

The focus in Rogers' definition is on the feelings and emotions, which is characteristic of *philia*-love, not on a transformed will that shows itself in self-sacrifice, which is what characterizes agape-love. It seems clear, then, that there is an equation between the love of the self-esteem movement and the love of self that Paul discusses in II Timothy 3.

Being aware of that equation, we need to consider further what Paul says about it. Note, for one thing, that Paul is talking about "perilous times," that is, times that will be difficult for Christians. One of the factors that will contribute to the stress of Christians, perhaps even the leading cause since Paul puts it first on his list, is that people will be lovers of them-

selves. Instead of exhibiting the serving, self-sacrificing love we learn from Jesus, the love that always looks out from itself, people in the last days will show a love that looks in.

It is instructive to peruse the list of sins that Paul says will accompany self-love in the last days, sins that may be considered the by-product of inappropriate self-love. Paul continues his discussion of the last days by saying: "Men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, unloving, unforgiving, slanderers, without self-control, brutal, despisers of good, traitors, headstrong, haughty, lovers of pleasure rather than lovers of God" (II Tim. 3:2-4).

What a contrast this list offers to the fruits of the Spirit the same apostle gives us in Galatians 5. In Galatians Paul tells us that "the fruit of the Spirit is love (agape), joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control" (Gal. 5:22,23). Or think of how differently Paul describes agape-love in I Corinthians 13. There he says: "Love suffers long and is kind; love does not envy; love does not parade itself; is not puffed up; does not behave rudely, does not seek its own" (II Cor. 13:4,5). By contrast, in the passage we are considering Paul says that those caught up in self-love will be proud, boasters, unloving, unforgiving, headstrong, haughty.

When we hear some of the adjectives Paul uses to describe those who are lovers of themselves, we can't help but see how often the description applies in the modern scene. Consider the trilogy, "boasters," "proud" and "haughty." Those words remind one of an advertisement that appeared in the Psychology Today magazine a number of years back. The ad read, in part:

"I LOVE ME. I am not conceited. I'm just a good friend to myself. And I like to do whatever makes me feel good. . . . Before you can do good things for yourself, you have to know yourself. . . . You need self-knowledge before you can have self-satisfaction. Think about it." (23)

That ad carried a disclaimer. The young man whose face appeared along with the words wanted us to know that he wasn't proud. "I'm not conceited," he assured us. But it was hard to avoid that conclusion in spite of his assurances. After all, what was his main point? It was that he wanted to do good things for himself; and in order to do that, he had to spend a considerable amount of time focusing his attention and energies inward.

As Paul evaluates the self-love philosophy, he makes two additional points that deserve attention. First of all, he says that self-love is characterized as "having a form of godliness, but denying its power" (II Tim. 3:5). What Paul is saying is that much of what people will do in the last days will seem to

resemble godliness in many ways. It will have an appearance that makes it seem acceptable to the believers at first glance.

How can lovers of themselves have the form of godliness? That may seem to be too much to grasp. But keep in mind something that C. S. Lewis' character, Screwtape, says in one of his letters to his nephew, Wormwood. (Screwtape is a senior devil advising his nephew on the finer points of how to lead Christians away from the faith.) In one of his fiendish communiques Screwtape writes:

"What we want . . . is to keep them (i.e., Christians) in the state of mind I call 'Christianity And.' You know--Christianity and the Crisis, Christianity and the New Psychology . . . If they must be Christians, let them at least be Christians with a difference. Substitute for the faith itself some Fashion with a Christian colouring." (24)

How timely those half-century-old words of Lewis are! The "Fashion" of today is the self-esteem school of psychology, and a good many within the church are so enamored of it they are practicing "Christianity And"--"Christianity and the New Psychology."

William Kilpatrick, a Christian who serves as professor of educational psychology at Boston College, has observed this phenomenon first-hand in his work. He writes:

"In many evangelical churches, positive thinking seems to have taken the place of faith. Almost everywhere, salvation is becoming equated with self-growth or feelings of O.K.-ness. In short, Christians have let their faith become entangled in a net of popular ideas about self-esteem and self-fulfillment that aren't Christian at all." (25)

Kilpatrick also touches upon Paul's statement that much of the thinking of the last days would have "a form of godliness." He says:

". . . there is a certain Christian tone to what psychology says and does: echoes of loving your neighbor as yourself, the promise of being made whole, avoidance of judging others. Those ideas are appealing to most people, no matter what their faith." (26)

There is no doubt in Kilpatrick's mind, however, that psychology as practiced by the self-esteem therapists denies the power of godliness, for he adds:

"True Christianity does not mix well with psychology. When you try to mix them, you often end up with a watered-down Christianity instead of a Christianized psychology." (27)

If Kilpatrick's word seem unduly strong, remember that the self-esteem movement did not spring from the pages of Scripture,

but from the minds of men whose view of the nature of man is inimical to the biblical view. With the psalmist we Christians confess: "Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin my mother conceived me" (Ps. 51:5). We also recognize the truth of God's estimate of man when He says: "The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth" (Gen. 8:21). When we look at ourselves, therefore, we confess with the psalmist: "I am a worm, and no man" (Ps. 22:6). We also acknowledge with Paul: "Sin . . . dwells within me. For I know that in me, (that is, in my flesh) nothing good dwells" (Rom. 7:17,18).

How different the perspective of the humanists who gave rise to the self-esteem movement. Hall and Lindzey, in the text to which we referred previously, summarize Maslow's position as affirming that "man has an inborn nature which is essentially good and never evil." (28) Eric Fromm and Carl Rogers would readily express their "Amen's" to such a theory of the nature of man. Fromm, for example, said that the humanists' ethics would be untenable if the "dogma of man's innate natural evilness were true." (29) In other words, he felt that there is no compatibility between the biblical model of man and the humanist model. The humanist model has to be correct and man has to be innately good, or all the humanists' psychological theories fall. That is why Rogers and others follow close on the trail of Maslow and Fromm and affirm without qualification that man can have an "unconditional positive self-regard." (30)

A natural, even necessary corollary of the humanists' optimistic view of man is the preoccupation with self. Paul analyzes this kind of thinking in some detail in the first chapter of Romans. He says that the unbelievers "exchanged the truth of God for the lie, and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever" (Rom. 1:25). The unbeliever would rather believe his own lies than the truth that God has revealed to him. As a result, he becomes the center of his life, and all his focus is turned inward instead of upward. He worships and serves himself instead of the One who made him.

Paul's inspired anticipation of the humanistic thinking behind such things as the self-love movement is frighteningly accurate. For example, Eric Fromm, who is a confessed atheist, has written a book entitled, "You Shall Be as Gods." The basic thesis of that book is, very simply, that the concept of God has evolved through the centuries. In a more primitive era, Fromm asserts, God was thought of as someone who existed outside us and above us and on whom we had to rely. But now, in a more perceptive age, according to Fromm, the concept of God has changed to the point that man is God--and should be considered as such. And if there is a sacred, Fromm says, its center is in the self. Fromm would therefore affirm that man should worship and serve himself. In his world-view, selfishness is not reprehensible, but a logical necessity!

There are very practical applications that the self-love psychologists draw from their belief that man is the center of life. Perhaps the most important one is that man relies only on his own resources when seeking to find meaning in his life or solutions to his problems. For example, Fromm states that "the position taken by . . . (the humanists is) that man is able to know what is good and to act accordingly on the strength of his natural potentialities and of his reason." (31) Stated another way, Fromm believes in both the innate goodness and the self-sufficiency of natural man.

You may be wondering at this point how secular self-theory relates to you and your work in the classroom. You don't intend to introduce your students to Fromm or any of the other self-love psychologists. Nor do you plan on using material that reflects their humanistic perspective.

We would encourage you to recognize, however, that self-esteem psychology is so pervasive that it is virtually impossible to avoid it in secular textbooks. Consider, for example, a program called "Pumsy in Pursuit of Excellence." According to the preface to the leader's guide, "Pumsy in Pursuit of Excellence" is a program "for teaching self-esteem to elementary school children through cognitive restructuring and positive thinking skills." The program centers around Pumsy, "a lovable dragon," and Friend, "a boy who has developed good skills as a positive thinker and (who) shares those skills with Pumsy." The program, which consists of eight units, "is the story of Pumsy's Journey as she undertakes the very big joy of shifting her self-esteem from being externally based to being internally based. . . . Pumsy decides to . . . learn how she can feel good about herself all by herself. She begins the process of shifting to a self-esteem which is internally based, dependent on something good happening in her." (31)

The humanistic tone of the program should be rather apparent just from that brief quotation. But let's see how the humanistic approach is carried out in one of the units. In Unit 4, which has the title, "I'M NO GOOD," the stated goal is: "Children will understand the importance of self-reliance in learning skills for maintaining a positive self-esteem." (32) Note that. That is Fromm and his self-love friends in action. The child is to rely on himself for whatever skills are necessary to maintain a positive self-image. He has the skills within him to do just that, so his focus should be on himself, not on someone outside him.

What we find in the Pumsy program is typical of secular self-esteem psychology generally and can serve as a summary of our critique. Self-esteem thinking is rooted in humanism, and man becomes both the center of its attention and the standard by which its achievements are measured. Luther, writing in a different context, characterized natural man as "humanus incurvitas



in se," "man turned in upon himself." That is both the focus and the fault of the self-love theory: Man's first concern is to be with himself, not with his neighbor and not even with his God. "You can't love anyone else," self-esteem psychologists assert, "unless you first love yourself." In addition, self-theory insists that "man is the measure of all things." He is innately good, yes, even divine, and he has the resources and skills within to be totally self-sufficient. He does not need to look outside himself. He may worship and serve the creature rather than the Creator.

#### IV. WHAT ABOUT, ". . . AS YOURSELF"?

There may be some here who still are not convinced that the self-esteem movement is incompatible with Christianity--at least not as they perceive and promote self-esteem. While acknowledging that it can be self-centered and self-serving, they may ask in all sincerity, "Doesn't the Bible open the door for self-esteem? Doesn't our Lord Himself command us to 'love our neighbor as ourself?'" That command seems to imply," these people may say, "that self-love need not be wrong--not in the Christian context."

Let us consider that passage in Luke 10 very briefly, beginning with a review of the context in which the words to "love our neighbor as ourself" appear. A lawyer had come to Jesus and asked Him, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" Luke informs us that the lawyer was testing Jesus, that is, he was looking for a way to trip up our Lord. Jesus answers the lawyer's questions with a question of His own, "What is written in the law?" The man, who was an expert in Jewish law, had no difficulty with Jesus' question. He gave a two-part answer: First, he quoted Deuteronomy 8:5, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all you soul and with all your strength and with all your mind;" then he quoted Leviticus 19:8, "(You shall love) your neighbor as yourself." In response to the lawyer's answer Jesus said, "You have answered rightly; do this and you will live." (Luke 10:29-37)

The lawyer still wasn't satisfied however. Luke says that he wanted "to justify himself," that is, he wanted to feel that he had kept God's law perfectly and was therefore acceptable to God as he was. So he asked Jesus, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus then told the story of the Good Samaritan, concluding with the exhortation to the legal expert, "Go and do likewise." (Luke 10: 29-37)

As we consider the words, "(Love) your neighbor as yourself," it is important to keep the context in mind. The point of the whole exchange between Jesus and the legal expert is whether the lawyer is good enough to stand before God as he is. His question, "What shall I do to inherit eternal life?" implies that he is. If Jesus will only tell him what to do, he'll do it.

Jesus' concern, then, is to correct the lawyer's mistaken notion that he is capable of doing everything that God requires. That is the purpose of the question, "What is written in the law?" Our Lord is gently trying to lead the lawyer to realize that even if we summarize God's requirements into two basic commandments, one covering each table of the law, we still aren't justified before God. Jesus wants the man to look outside himself, particularly at the way he has loved those around him, and come to realize that he has fallen far short of what God demands.

There are some who have missed the point of the exchange between Jesus and the lawyer. Walter Trobisch, to whom we referred earlier, is one of them. In "Love Yourself" Trobisch discusses some of the passages that talk about loving your neighbor as yourself, and he comes to a startling conclusion. He says: "The command to love your neighbor is never given without the command to love yourself." (34) What Trobisch is saying, then, is that there are really three commands in the Luke passage: one to love God; a second to love ourselves; and the third to love our neighbor. And just to make sure that we don't miss that point, Trobisch adds, "Self-love is thus the prerequisite and the criterion for our conduct towards our neighbor. You cannot love neighbor, you cannot love God, unless you first love yourself." (35)

We have no quarrel with Trobisch's statement that self-love is the criterion for our conduct towards our neighbor, provided we understand that in the scriptural context. That is one of the points of the parable of the Good Samaritan. As Luther has pointed out, the Good Samaritan is really our Lord, and we sinners are the ones who were left for dead, (dead in our trespasses and sins!) far from home. Jesus came to us in our time of need and filled those needs completely, at no small cost to Himself. The love that we have received and learned from Him and naturally show to ourselves is to be the criterion for how we love those around us, whoever they may be.

Where we do not agree with Trobisch is in adding the word, "prerequisite." Self-love is not the prerequisite for loving others. It is a given that we already love ourselves. Without that assumption, the command to love our neighbor as ourselves becomes meaningless. The problem of the lawyer was not that he didn't have enough self-love, but that he loved himself too much! He wanted to "justify" himself, remember. His focus was on himself, and he had little understanding of what it meant to reach out to others in love. He even had to have the word "neighbor" defined for him. So Jesus told the parable of the Good Samaritan to show him how limited his love for others was. That parable certainly wasn't designed to foster an even higher self-interest.

Another passage to which people sometimes appeal to justify Christian self-love is Ephesians 5:28. In that passage Paul says, "So husbands ought to love their own wives as their own

bodies; he who loves his wife loves himself." To some this seems to be an even clearer assertion that self-love is not only permissible, but even commendable. They point out that in this passage Paul doesn't just assume men love themselves; he specifically adds that the person who loves his wife is then loving himself. "Paul wouldn't have added that second statement," they say, "unless he wanted to encourage loving ourselves."

The problem with that interpretation is that it ignores the context of the passage. Paul's point throughout the last part of chapter five, from verse twenty-one through verse thirty-three, is to talk about the loving, nourishing relationship that is to exist in Christian marriages. Paul begins that discussion by encouraging the wives to submit to their husbands as we, the members of the church, submit to Christ. Then he turns his attention to the husbands and tells them to love their wives "just as Christ also loved the Church and gave Himself for it." After giving the supreme example of love, Jesus and His love for us, Paul uses a lesser example, the way we love ourselves. Just as the love we have for ourselves was to be an example for the lawyer, so it is to be a standard by which we judge how well we are loving our wives.

It should be clear, then, that in both the passages we have considered Jesus is not encouraging us to love ourselves more, but to love those around us more.

#### V. SCRIPTURAL GUIDELINES FOR DEVELOPING AN ACCURATE SELF-IMAGE

To this point we have not been very enthusiastic about the self-esteem movement. We have even been sceptical about a "Christianized" version of it. We do not want to give the impression, however, that there are no positive guidelines we can offer on this subject. The Inspired Word speaks a great deal about man and his greatest needs and how to fill those needs. We now want to consider four scriptural guidelines for developing a proper self-image in our students.

During the course of this paper I have been using expressions such as "self-esteem," "self-love" and "positive self-image," but I have been doing so with a great deal of reservation. For one thing, those terms have a humanistic origin. They were spawned in the humanistic pond and then slowly evolved into the be-all of much of modern secular psychology. Secular psychologists and counselors are the one who most often promote the self-theory, so it is difficult to use their terms without humanistic connotations being attached to them.

But the "self" terms also miss the point. When one reads the Scriptures and hears a David or a Paul talking about himself, one does not get the impression that they are concerned about a

positive or negative self-image. Their real concern is always seeing themselves as God wants them to, whether that's negative under certain circumstances or positive in others. To put it another way, their emphasis is always on an accurate self-image. I would suggest, therefore, that if we must use a "self" term, we do well to use the term "accurate self-image" or "biblical self-image."

Having established that, we will now consider the main scriptural guidelines we should follow in promoting an accurate self-image in our students.

Guideline #1: The first guideline we would suggest is that any self-image we promote in our students must be based solely on the Word of God.

I realize that our first guideline may seem to be rather self-evident, perhaps too self-evident even to mention. I still feel it is necessary to state it, however, because there is always the danger of adopting a secular approach without testing it to see if it conforms to the Word of God. This is especially true in an area such as psychology, in which we Christians may feel less than adequate. When we get into the realm of psychology, we often feel we are in an area about which we know very little. We do not usually feel that our training has equipped us very well to deal with psychological matters. So we tend to rely rather heavily on those who are considered to be experts in the field, even if they are humanists.

Lawrence Crabb, a Christian psychologist whose writings offer much that I can recommend, discusses the danger we've been talking about in one of his works. He says:

"In an effort to define a truly Christian approach to counseling, I began reading the works of evangelical Christian psychologists and psychiatrists. The more I read, the more difficult it became to block out the impression that, with a few rewarding exceptions, humanistic psychology was not being replaced by Christianity, but rather integrated with certain biblical ideas. Although the adequacy and supremacy of Jesus Christ often were asserted, the discussion of problems and solutions seemed to rely upon the wisdom of man." (36)

Note what Crabb is saying. We, who haven't had a lot of formal training in psychology, aren't the only ones who are inclined to rely on the experts in that area. Even Christian psychologists and psychiatrists do that, although they are not always aware what they are doing. They will unwittingly integrate secular psychology with sacred Scripture, and the result is that humanism triumphs.

If we are to develop a truly biblical self-image in our students, it isn't enough that we integrate a few biblical ideas with a humanistic approach. Our approach must be thoroughly biblical, for Peter tells us: "If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God" (I Pet. 4:11)

The context in which Peter speaks those words is a discussion of spiritual gifts. The apostle began by pointing out that "each has received a gift" and that each gift is to be used to serve one another (v. 10). He then discussed how the various gifts are to be used and he said that those whom God entrusts with the "speaking" gift should "speak as the oracles of God." The word, "oracles," that Peter uses refers either to "divine utterances" or to "the Scriptures themselves." In either case the point is the same. When you and I speak in the sense of directing people in the ways of God, there should be no "uncertain sound," to use one of Paul's expressions. People should not have to wonder, "Where did he get that approach?" We should speak as the oracles of God, that is, when we speak, they should be certain that we are speaking God's Word, not man's wisdom.

Guideline #2: Closely related to the first guideline, if fact, flowing out of it, is the second: The self-image we develop in students should be the result of a proper application of Law and Gospel.

The scriptural basis for this guideline is Paul's second letter to Timothy. In that epistle Paul writes: "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the Word of truth" (I Tim. 2:15).

When we hear these words, we naturally respond to what the apostle is saying. After all, we want to be "approved to God." That is really the goal of all who are in the public ministry. They want to carry out their responsibilities in a way that will pass the test of God Himself, which is what the word "approved" here means. Their only desire is to present themselves approved to God, not to impress men.

And how do we do that? Paul explains when he says that such approval comes through "rightly dividing the Word of truth." The word that is translated as "rightly dividing" was originally used to describe the work of one of the stewards or managers in a household, particularly the one charged with the responsibility of dividing the food up for the various members. He was to divide it rightly, that is, to see that each person got exactly what he needed. That is what we are to do in a spiritual way in the little household that meets in our class each weekday. We are to see that each receives the very portion of God's Word that he needs at a given moment in his life.

"Rightly dividing the Word of truth" means that we will have

to know the spiritual status of the students under us. In one case it may mean giving the student a portion of the Law. In the case of another student, who may sit right next to the first student, we may need to offer him a generous portion of the Gospel. Each student's needs will be different, and the individual students will have different needs depending on his spiritual status at the time.

Perhaps the most difficult part of "rightly dividing the Word of truth" will be using the Law when it needs to be used--and using it as clearly and forcefully as it is needed. We will be reluctant to use the Law particularly when we are trying to develop greater self-esteem in students. We have an almost natural tendency to assume that there is something incompatible or inconsistent about using the Law to develop a positive self-image.

There are some who feel that the Law shouldn't be used at all when trying to develop self-esteem. That is the position of Robert Schuller in a chapter he contributed to a book entitled, "Your Better Self." In that chapter Schuller states:

"Man's deepest need is for self-esteem. I consider this to be universal. I have traveled around the world and met Christians and non-Christians in a variety of cultures and have found this to be true.

"Let me illustrate how this relates to sin, salvation, and fulness of life. . . .

"A central theme of Reformed theology is that a human being is, by nature, rebellious against God. . . .

"I happen to believe with all my soul and being that you don't approach the rebellious person and say, 'Hey, buddy, you're rebellious.' You're going to get a sock on the chin. But that's the classical approach. Tell him what a sinner he is, convict him of his guilt." (37)

Schuller sincerely feels that you shouldn't preach the Law to a person until he feels good about himself--and then it won't be necessary. He feels that preaching the Law to rebellious sinners is "battering their self-respect and insulting their dignity." "That," he continues, "violates their self-esteem." (38)

Schuller's methodology, which is designed to promote self-esteem, remember, is entirely out of harmony with Paul's inspired approach. For instance, in his first letter to the people at Corinth Paul speaks out sharply against the man who had married his father's wife. It is pure Law when Paul tells the Corinthians: "Deliver such a one to Satan" (I Cor. 5:5). Rightly dividing the Word of truth in that situation meant preaching the Law so forcefully that the man could feel the flames of hell lapping at his feet.

This does not mean, of course, that we are to teach nothing

but Law or even predominately Law. We mentioned that the spiritual status of the child at any given moment will determine which portion of God's Word we give to him. Paul's second letter to the people of Corinth shows him dealing in an entirely different way with the same man whom he treated so sternly in the first letter. Apparently the Law did its work and the man recognized his sin and asked for forgiveness. Unfortunately, the Corinthians did not understand that they were then to apply the healing balm of the Gospel to his bruised conscience. So Paul tells them: "You ought rather to forgive and comfort him, lest perhaps such one be wallowed up with too much sorrow" (II Cor. 2:7). Paul was a man who knew from personal experience the despair to which an anguished conscience could lead. So he instructed the Corinthians to reassure the penitent sinner of full forgiveness.

The lesson for us in this biblical example is that we will use both Law and Gospel in developing a proper self-image in our students. At times we will find it necessary to show them through the Law that the face of God turned in their direction is an angry, judging face. In other cases, including those in which the Law has done its convicting work, we will want to lead our students to the warm, loving embrace of their Savior. Only dividing God's Word rightly according to the circumstances will lead them to see themselves as God sees them.

C. S. Lewis offers a comment in "Mere Christianity" that can serve as a summary of our second guideline. He says:

"The Christian religion is, in the long run, a thing of unspeakable comfort. But it does not begin in comfort. It begins in the dismay I have been describing, and it is no use at all trying to go on to that comfort without first going through the dismay."(39)

Our students must first know the dismay of the Law and then the comfort of the Gospel. To take any other approach or even to reverse that approach would not be developing a biblical self-image in them.

Guideline #3: The third guideline we suggest for developing an accurate self-image in students is that their self-image must be based on inner renewal, not on outer conformity.

This guideline is based on the meaning of the word "repentance," which is the outcome we are trying to achieve through a proper preaching of Law and Gospel. The word "repentance" literally means "a change of mind."

When the Bible talks about people "repenting," it means that they "change their mind" in two different areas. First of all, they change their minds about themselves and their sins. When they repent, they no longer feel smug, secure and self-satisfied. Instead, they are terror-stricken, for the sins they used to ig-

nore or dismiss so casually now rise up to haunt them night and day.

The second area in which repentant people change their mind has to do with Jesus. Once they repent, they take a radically different approach to Him. They don't merely admire Him from afar, at best acknowledging Him as a wonderful teacher or an inspiring example. Rather, they throw themselves at His feet, confessing that He is the Lamb of God who alone can take away the sins of the world. Jesus becomes so important to them that repentant people say with Paul, "I count all things loss for the excellence of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord" (Phil. 3: 8).

An accurate self-image must be an outgrowth of that inner renewal which we call "repentance" and which involves nothing less than a complete change of mind. If we have students who seem quite well adjusted and who exhibit a considerable amount of self-esteem, but who do not seem to have had a scriptural change of mind, we have not developed a proper self-image. A self-image that is truly biblical must begin with an inner change of mind, with a turning away from sin and trusting solely in Jesus.

The Bible gives us both negative and positive examples of the change of mind that is needed before we have an accurate self-image. On the negative side, there is the example of the Pharisees who came out to hear John the Baptist preach. Few people had as much self-esteem as the Pharisees. People looked on them as the paragons of piety who had a right relationship with God. (Even Jesus acknowledged that, in one sense, they had no equals when it came to righteous living. His remark in the Sermon on the Mount about needing to exceed the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees shows that.) They were also secure in their self-estimate, as the parable of the Pharisee and the publican demonstrates. We would assume, therefore, that John would have given the Pharisees a few public plaudits and a personal pat on the back and sent them on their way.

You know, however, that that was not the case. John did everything he could to destroy the self-esteem of the Pharisees, even to calling them a "brood of vipers" (Matt. 3:7)! And why? Because their self-esteem was not based on inner renewal, but on outer conformity. No one conformed to the outer demands of the law better than Pharisees, as we mentioned. And no one had a better public image than the Pharisees, not to mention their own self-image! But the Pharisees did not have an accurate self-image because they had not repented in the scriptural sense of that word. Therefore John spoke out against them in as unsparing a way as you'll find anywhere in Scripture. He did so in order to achieve a proper self-image that began with a true change of mind.



The Bible gives us a number of positive examples of true inner repentance leading to an accurate self-evaluation. One that comes to mind is that which took place on Pentecost, when Peter preached to the people who gathered at the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Peter first told the people that they had been privileged to witness a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy. He then preached the Law very sharply to them, saying among other things: "You have taken (Jesus of Nazareth) with lawless hands, have crucified (Him) and put (Him) to death" (Acts 2:23).

Luke tells us that when the people heard Peter's condemnation, "they were cut to the heart" and wondered what they should do (Acts 2:37). Peter then told them to repent and to exhibit their repentance by being baptized in the name of Jesus for the remission of sins. Luke reports that 3,000 souls "gladly received his word" (v. 41) and were baptized. In other words, there was real joy--a positive self-image, to put it in terms we have been using--when there was first an inner renewal.

It is important that we stress the need for inner renewal as the basis of a biblical self-image, because we can easily be deceived in this matter. Many times we will confuse an outer conformity with a good self-image. Recall the words of Dobson, "The 'Law of Reinforcement' is magnificent because it works!" We, like Dobson, can easily mistake an outwardly conforming life with a good self-image, but they are not necessarily the same thing. The students entrusted to us will respond to positive and negative reinforcement. You and I also keep our speedometer right at 55 when there is a highway patrol car in our rear-view mirror! But going 55 in those circumstances does not necessarily mean that we are conforming to God's will and may therefore feel good about ourselves. In the same way, children may do what is expected of them only to avoid some negative reinforcement. In such cases the method may "work," but it will not lead children to a proper self-image, seeing themselves as God sees them.

Guideline #4: The fourth guideline we would give for developing a biblical self-image in a child is that any image the child has of himself must be related to God's plan for his life.

One of the themes that Paul strikes again and again in his epistles is that we do not belong to ourselves and have only ourselves to whom we must answer. For example, in I Corinthians the apostle says: "You are not your own. For you were bought at a price" (I Cor. 6:19,20). The picture Paul is using here and in the next chapter is that of a slave who had been purchased by someone. That slave did not belong to himself. He literally belonged to his master. He was considered part of the master's chattel. In the same way, according to Paul, you and I have been "bought at a price," the price being nothing less than the suffering and death of Jesus. We, therefore, do not belong to our-

selves. We truly belong to God, even more than a slave in Paul's day belonged to his master.

Since we now belong to God, everything we do should be to His glory. Paul says just that as he continues in the passage in I Corinthians 6: "Therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's" (v. 20). The things we do (our body) and even the things we think (our spirit) are now to give glory to God. Paul pushes this point to what some might term "the extreme," for he says, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God" (I Cor. 10:31).

If we want to develop a proper self-image in our students, we will direct them to seek God's plan for their lives and to glorify Him by carrying out that plan.

One of the besetting problems for people who have what is termed "low self-esteem" is that they use a wrong standard for judging themselves and their worth or value. Paul touches on this in Romans 12 when he says, "Do not be conformed to this world" (v. 2). Our self-esteem should not depend on how well we conform to this world or measure up to the standard the world sets. Rather, the apostle says that we who have been transformed by the renewing of our minds should seek to "prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God" (v. 2).

Paul is not only exhorting the Romans to lead sanctified lives, although that certainly is part of his purpose here. He is really interested in having them present their "bodies" (that is, their whole lives), as "living sacrifices To God" (v. 1.) Their focus is to be on God and what He wants of them in their daily lives.

Finding our joy and satisfaction in doing what God wants of us is far more reassuring than seeking self-esteem in an ever-changing standard that society sets up. For many young people self-esteem is dependent on a wrong standard for evaluating worth. Among teenagers, for example, beauty, intelligence, athletic ability and affluence are the factors that determine their sense of personal worth. The problem with such standards, however, is really two-fold. For one thing, they are, at bottom, the essence of the humanist's fixation with himself. "I'm not pretty enough!" the young girl wails. "He scored more touchdowns than I did," the football player moans dejectedly. The focus is always on "me," and the question is ever, "How do I compare?" In addition, that is an ever-changing standard, which can never really satisfy. There will always be someone else who can swell the tape measure another inch or who can throw a football another ten yards.

If we would develop a biblical self-image in our students, we will want to follow Paul's "more excellent way" (I Cor. 12:

31). We will direct our students to seek God's plan for their lives and to use the talents He has given them to glorify Him and to edify their fellow believers. And when students do that, they will experience the blessed paradox that Jesus describes when He says: "Whoever loses his life for My sake will find it" (Matt. 16:23). They will, in short, know the joy of offering themselves as a living sacrifice to God.

#### CONCLUSION

There is much more that we could say about the subject of self-esteem. For example, we have only begun to scratch the surface when it comes to offering biblical guidelines. It would be most instructive to consider the different ways in which Paul admonishes and encourages various congregations in his epistles. It would also be worthwhile to study the different approaches Paul uses to speak about himself and others, both positively and negatively. In addition, there are a number of interesting "case studies" that show us people moving toward a proper self-image. Psalm 131 and Romans 7 and 8 come to mind immediately. The penitential psalms also would offer fertile soil for this topic.

I would encourage you to continue studying this important topic--one that will only grow more important, it seems, with the passing years. And I pray that God would lead all of us to understand anew that our goal is to lead children to a biblical self-image and to see themselves as God sees them, both in His plan of salvation and in His plan of service.