

Esteem

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Introduction.

- A. Perhaps the two most powerful forces that drive human beings are what others think of us and what we think of ourselves. The effects of the opinions of others are evident everywhere. All of us who are adults can remember how crushingly important it was in junior high and high school to be well thought of by our classmates. That desire to be liked and respected may become muted in adulthood, but it certainly does not vanish. The clothes we wear, the cars we drive, the houses we buy and maintain, and even the things we do for fun are often determined largely by social pressures. We want others to esteem us.
- B. Similarly, almost all of us have an internal measuring stick that we use to judge our lives, to push us to excel in the things we desire and to shun the things we abhor. We value achievement in ourselves, at school, on the job, and in our personal lives. Though we delight in the respect of others, we also value our self-respect.
- C. This search for the esteem of others and of self is a basic human impulse, but it can very easily be twisted by Satan. If we start caring more about the crowd than we do about God, sooner or later, we will follow the crowd to do evil. Likewise, Satan often tempts us to consider ourselves in an ungodly way. Either he puffs us up with pride so that we think we don't need God, or he crushes us with despair so that we come to believe that even God can't make us worthwhile. Almost everyone will at one time drift to one of these extremes.
- D. Because this danger is so real and so common, it's important that we turn to God's word to learn how we should view others and ourselves. The Bible reveals a very different idea of what is important in a human being, an idea based not on the world's values, but on God's. Consider the anointing of David in 1 Samuel 16:6-7. Samuel thought he knew what God would want, but God actually wanted something quite different. Let's consider God's word this morning, then, to learn what it has to say to us on the subject of esteem.

I. Not According to the World.

- A. First, as the story of Samuel and David points out, the esteem in which we hold someone is not measured according to the world's standards. Those standards aren't hard to spot. It's obvious that the world values money and the things that it can buy. Who among us hasn't drooled, just once, at the latest-model Corvette, or at the massive house with the manicured lawn in the best part of town? The world goes a step further and says that the one who owns the impressive things must be an impressive person. It envies the rich.
- B. Success in competition is also significant in the eyes of the world, and really, these days, what isn't a competition? People compete against each other for success in the workplace, in the classroom, on the golf course, and even through the achievements of their children. Those who don't win this constant competition are labeled losers, with all that implies. The world tries to convince us that people cannot have intrinsic worth, only worth as compared to the worthlessness of another. It all boils down to "I'm better than you are."
- C. When we consider this worldview in light of what the Scripture says, however, we recognize at least two serious problems with the I'm-better-than-you mindset. First, we have to recognize that the things that impress most people aren't the things that impress God because God knows where they come from. Look at Paul's question for the Corinthians in 1 Corinthians 4:7. Paul here speaks of spiritual things, but the point is generally true. What do any of us have that God has not given us? If we are particularly good at anything, it's because God gave us the ability to be good at it. Some years ago, when I was on a rec-league soccer team, we had on our team that year a guy who had never played soccer before in his life. However, when he was in high school, he'd been the 5A tennis champion of the state of Texas, so he was a phenomenal athlete. He just decided that learning to play soccer would be fun. That first practice, he was pretty ordinary as a soccer player. By the second game of the season, he was one of the best players on the team, better than I would be if I practiced soccer for a million years. He was good, but he was good because God made him that way.
- D. The second problem with esteem based on human accomplishment is not where the accomplishments come from, but where they're going to end up. Consider Solomon's words in Ecclesiastes 9:5-6. Basically, folks, unless the Lord comes back first, all of us are going to die, and once we're dead, all of our accomplishments count for nothing. True, there are some people who succeed so well on earth that their fame outlives them, men like Shakespeare and Napoleon. We may care about their accomplishments, but guess who doesn't? They don't. Wherever Shakespeare is now, all of his plays and sonnets are now the last thing on his mind.

II. According to the Value God Sets.

- A. Once we get past the prejudices of the world, we need to learn to value ourselves and others according to the value that God sets for us, because that's ultimately the value that matters. Let's look at Peter's thoughts on the subject in 1 Peter 1:18-19. It's critical to understand this because the best measure of value is what someone is willing to pay for it. I remember talking to Jeff Andrews several months ago about his old

Transformer toy collection. He said that when he and Paula were getting together a down payment for their house, he sold one of those Transformers—just one—for several hundred dollars. I myself wouldn't say that any toy is worth that much, but who am I to argue with a stack of dead presidents? Things are worth what someone will pay for them. Now, if that's true, if price determines value, what are we worth? God didn't buy us out of sin with gold and silver, not even with TONS of gold and silver. Instead, we have been purchased with the blood of Christ, and when we consider the lifeblood of Jesus, "precious" is an understatement. That blood flowed through the veins of God on earth, and it was poured out for our salvation. No matter how we may feel, there is no such thing as a worthless Christian. Indeed, there is nothing in heaven or on earth that is worth more than we are, because God was willing to pay that much. That is our true value.

- B. Along these lines, consider Peter's description of Christians in 1 Peter 2:9-10. Does that make us sound like people to be looked down upon? True, we may have been nobodies, but God has made us all somebodies. We are kings in the eyes of God. We are priests. We are the people whom He especially loves, whom He has consecrated for His own special purposes. That means that each one of us is valuable and important. We need to learn to see ourselves in that way, the way that God sees us, not the way that the devil wants to deceive us into seeing. Even more than that, we need to learn to see our brethren in that way. There's no such thing as a perfect Christian. They may struggle with some sin, they may say something offensive or embarrassing, or they may just do something we don't like. Brethren, we need to make sure that we don't allow such actions to cause us to look down upon the brother for whom Christ died. Let's use God's value.
- C. Even beyond our earthly status and our earthly worth, let's consider the esteem that Jesus has for us, as revealed in John 17:24. Jesus values us so much that He wants to be with us forever, and that is a truly amazing thing. It's not always easy to be with someone for an extended period of time. I remember a family vacation when I was about 12 or 13. We were going to take three or four weeks in the summer, and, by car, tour all the national parks in the West. The problem was that my little sister and I couldn't stand to be in the same car for that long. We spent the first three days picking and fussing and fighting. My dad got sick of it, and, just like in the movies, threatened to turn the car around and go home. Susan and I kept right on fighting, and my dad did exactly what he said. In Pocatello, Idaho, we turned around and went back home. To this day, I have never seen the redwoods of California. It's not easy to be close to someone for an extended period of time, and yet Jesus wants to be close to us forever. Now, this is not because Jesus is dumb and doesn't know what He's getting into. This is because Jesus knows exactly who we are, knows exactly how long eternity is, and loves each one of us so much that He wants us with Him forever. That is how truly wonderful each one of us is, and how we should learn to see other Christians too.

III. According to Our Growth in Him.

- A. Beyond this, however, we also need to learn to value ourselves according to our growth in God. Look at what Jeremiah writes in Jeremiah 9:23-24. I actually have this Scripture tacked up on the bulletin board in my office because I think it's so important to see what's really important in people. Someone's rich? Who cares! Someone's athletically talented or good-looking? Not important. Someone's got a bucketload of college degrees? It doesn't matter. But if someone knows God, in their hearts and in their lives, that IS a big deal.
- B. There are a couple of applications we need to make from this. We see the first in 1 Thessalonians 5:12-13. This tells us about the esteem in which we need to hold our elders, not because they've got a church position, not because they have some high rank in the world, but because of their work in the Lord. Brethren, we have two amazing elders in this congregation, and we need to thank God constantly that we are blessed with men of such character, wisdom, and spirituality. Let's give our elders the respect they deserve.
- C. The principle of this passage isn't just limited to elders, though. We need to esteem godliness in any Christian. When I look out across this congregation, I see so many of you older Christians in whom I rejoice, not just because you're nice people (although you are), but because your lives show the righteousness that only comes from decades spent walking with Jesus. I rejoice also in you who are my age, for the maturity that you already have in the faith and for the way that you dedicate yourselves to raising godly children. And when I look at those of you who are younger than I am, even those of you who aren't Christians yet, I rejoice in the way that your lives are turning toward God. Along these lines, I remember something that Chip Copley did a couple weeks ago that really sticks out in my mind. After the meeting sermon Monday evening, which talked about four simple things we can do to evangelize, I was standing in the doorway as I always do, handing out outlines. As Chip went by, he insisted that I give him one, and as he did so, he said to himself, "Shine, speak, invite, welcome." Chip wanted that outline because he wanted to bring people to Christ, and I could not be happier with that attitude. Let's learn to esteem each other for the goodness that is so evident in this church.
- D. Finally, though, we need to apply the same standard to ourselves. Look at what Paul writes in Romans 2:28-29. When we do right, we receive praise from God, and we should likewise learn to prize our own service to Him. This is not to say that we should ever be satisfied, or ever count ourselves as righteous, but it is right to be pleased when we do right. Let's learn to see ourselves as God sees us, because that's the right way.

Conclusion. If you want to have a life that's truly valuable and valued, come to God today.