

Do You Possess Self-Esteem or God-Esteem?

A food company couldn't understand why its instant cake mix wouldn't sell. It discovered consumers felt uneasy that the only requirement was simply adding water to the mix. People thought it was too easy.

So the company changed its formula, which now required adding an egg. This little tweak led to instant success.

That story reminds me of how many of us Christians view grace. It seems so elementary, yet so many of us struggle with the fact that we don't have to try harder to be qualified, to receive God's approval or to be acquitted for our sins. Jesus said, "It is finished," but sometimes we can't help but add an "if" or a "but" to our Savior's affirmation. We need to add that extra "egg" to add to God's recipe for redemption.

So, why is it so hard to receive God's gift of grace? In Acts 26, Paul poses a pivotal question: "Who are You, Lord?" Do we really know Him? Our perception of God will determine whether we are driven by self-esteem or God-esteem. Self-esteem, by definition, is a disposition that represents the way someone perceives their worthiness. It will always be relative.

God-esteem is absolute. It is knowing and believing that redemption is not proof of our worth but of God's grace. In other words, self-esteem is how you see yourself. God-esteem is how you know God sees you. This is important, because at the heart of it is faith. What do you really believe?

Your perspective of God will set you free or keep you enslaved. A recent survey by *Time* magazine reveals that 75 percent of Americans perceive God to be a judgmental, angry, authoritative God. A survey by Baylor University further concluded that of those who had a judgmental God concept, 45

percent experienced social anxiety, 37 percent paranoia and 33 percent compulsions. In the Conquer series, Dr. Ted Roberts explains, "You wonder why such bondage results in our culture. When you have a judgmental God you will be rigid, judgmental and addicted."

The wrong God-perspective will affect your self-esteem by shifting the focus to you rather than fixing your eyes on the cross. If you worship a distant, judgmental God, you will constantly strive to please Him. You will continue to carry the burden of sin and will struggle with shame and guilt every time you fail. Without knowing the Giver of grace, it's almost impossible to be gripped by grace, as Dr. Roberts points out: "Grace is not a point of theology. It's a Person."

So, is it possible to be a Christian and not know grace? Hebrews 4:2-3 warns the believers to avoid the mistake of their forefathers, who did not enter the Promised Land because they failed to enter into God's rest:

"But the message they heard was of no value to them, because they did not share the faith of those who obeyed. Now we who have believed enter that rest, just as God has said, 'So I declared on oath in my anger, "They shall never enter my rest"' (NIV).

The Israelites' failure to trust God at His word, despite experiencing His mind-blowing miracles, cost them their entrance to Canaan. Being governed by self-esteem rather than God-esteem is entrenched in an intimacy disorder in our relationship with Christ—a pressing fact, as our perception of God will determine the direction of our life.

There's a lie that's motivating behavior. Relativism has permeated the church. Many Christians today know a truth they don't really believe. According to Dr. James Reeves:

"Many Christians are frustrated, even at a point of giving up on the concept of absolute truth in God's Word because they

say: 'You know, I believed this and it didn't work.' I say, 'No, you don't believe that. You know it, because you memorized the verse, but you don't believe it. If you believed that truth, your behavior would change.' All behavior is based on belief, not on knowledge. So, when helping people with addictions, it's important to dig through the knowledge and get down to the lie that's motivating the destructive behavior."

How do men get out of the cycle of bondage? Well, first of all, it's important to be gripped by grace, because telling them to try harder simply won't work. At some point we have to understand that the only thing that can change us is the grace of God, as Dr. Roberts explains in the Conquer series:

"Time and again a client will tell me, 'You know I'm really struggling.' And I say, 'You're angry at God, aren't you?' 'That's right. I'm really angry.' I'll say, 'You know why? You had the wrong God.' Once you look back and see God from the perspective of His new covenant you'll realize, through all your life, how faithful He's been to you."

The moment we allow ourselves to be gripped by God's grace is the moment we attain God-esteem. The key is to know Christ intimately. The law came through Moses, but grace and truth came through Jesus. As Dr. Roberts says, "Sinning doesn't make you a sinner. You sin because you are a sinner. The gift of non-condemnation gives you the freedom to not sin anymore."

So how do we transition from trying harder to having God-esteem? The apostle Paul tells us in Galatians 5:16-18:

"I say then: Walk in the Spirit, and you shall not fulfill the lust of the flesh. For the flesh lusts against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; and these are contrary to one another, so that you do not do the things that you wish. But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the law" (NKJV).

The Holy Spirit is the One who enables us to put on the new man and to know that we are truly His, fully paid for by the blood of Jesus Christ.

The Conquer series takes a more in-depth look at God-esteem and the role of the Holy Spirit to help men become conquerors one day at a time.

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