

THE PSYCHOLOGIZING OF THE GOSPEL

As we look around us today, we can't help but be concerned about the condition of our country and the world. I am fully aware that people of all ages have said that, but I think that as Christians, we see the way that the homes, the society, and the church are going and we need to ask ourselves if this is a good thing. If our answer to this is no, then we need to ask ourselves how we got to this point and what we can do to make a difference. I became a Christian in 1956. At that time, the divorce rate in the country was about 25% but the divorce rate in the church was about 1.5%. Today the divorce rate in the church is about the same as it is in the rest of the population. In fact, we are told that the rates of alcoholism, spouse abuse, child abuse, and drug abuse is not much different in the church than it is in the rest of the population. If that is true, then there is no church.

I am not suggesting that there is only one reason for the decline of the church, there are many. But I do think that our view of God, ourselves, and how we relate to God is at the very foundation of the problem. Christians have come to have a very high estimation of themselves and a corresponding low estimation of God. This has led to a church that is activist rather than prayerful. Where did this notion come from? Certainly not from the Word of God! I think that a great deal of it came through the adoption of psychology as a co-equal authority with the Bible. I can hear the loud protest as I typed that last sentence. HOW CAN YOU SAY SUCH A THING !! I can say it because of the proliferation of "Christian" books based almost entirely on Psychology. Just listen to the psychobabble that you hear at Christian gatherings. They will tell you that they came from a "co-dependant home", or that their family was "dysfunctional" and so they are not responsible for their behavior. Now I don't want to give the impression that I think that psychology is without merit. There are mental diseases and chemical imbalances in the brain. We need people who can diagnose and treat these things. But psychology is based on entirely different principals than the gospel. This is especially true with regard to the nature of man. Psychology is based on the perfectibility of man. Psychology says that man is basically good, and if we can control his environment and the way that he sees himself, he will be all right. The Bible says that man is fallen and as such is basically sinful. He

can not save himself. He needs a savior. He can only be changed from the inside, by giving him a new nature. Confusion about these basics leads to false doctrines.

Of all the false doctrines to be advanced in the past few years, perhaps the self esteem doctrine has been the most destructive. The reason is because it seems so right. Doesn't God want us to feel good about ourselves? Lets see if we can discover what the Bible has to say on this subject and what result this doctrine has had on the church.

Let's start with a definition of self esteem. SELF: "one's individual person."; ego. ESTEEM; "to regard with respect or affection: to set a value on: to rate highly." So self esteem would be to set a value on; or to rate highly, ones self.

Now let us see what the Bible says about it. No matter how good and right a thing sounds, if it conflicts with what the Word of God says, we need to look deeper.

The Apostle Paul was as successful a Christian as we can find in the new testament. Lets see what he has to say on the subject. In Philippians 2:3 we read, ***"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind let each of you regard one another as more important than himself."*** Romans 7:18 says ***"For I know that nothing good dwells in me, that is, in my flesh; for the wishing is present in me, but the doing of the good is not."*** In Romans 7:24 Paul says, ***"Wretched man that I am! Who will set me free from the body of this death?"*** Again in Romans 12:3 we read ***"For through the grace given to me I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith."*** The caution here was not against feeling too low about yourself but rather about feeling too high about yourself. It doesn't appear to me that Paul was too big on this idea of having a high self esteem. Let us examine this from the roots and see what we can understand about this subject. The truth is that every one of us has the potential to be another Adolf Hitler, given the right opportunity. Because this is true, man has learned that he must have laws to govern society. It is society and its customs and laws that keep our actions in check. Without society with its laws we have what we call anarchy; where the strongest and most ruthless survive at the expense of those who are weaker. If we could peel back the layers of culture, denial, excuses, and self deception about our

true natures we would be horrified at what we would see. A list of attributes that we would see is given to us in Galatians 5:19-21. It says; ***"Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: amorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes dissension's, factions, envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarned you that those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God."*** We like to white wash these attributes and try to make them look pretty but the truth is, this is who we are. If it was true that man was basically good, we would not fear anarchy because man would act according to his nature which would be good. But the truth is that anarchy is a nightmare because man displays his true nature which is just as the Bible describes.

What is there about your nature that should merit high esteem? Is it your unflinching love for everyone? Even your enemies? Is it your flawless self control? The truth is that "self esteem" is built on falsehoods, self deception, and a lack of understanding about the true nature of man.

The attributes of the Holy Spirit are listed in Galatians 5:22-23. They are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The degree to which we can shift control of our life from our spirit to the Holy Spirit is the degree to which we live the Christian life. You may ask how we can shift this control. There are several things that we can do but we will always be in the process as long as we are here on this earth. There is the story of the Indian man who had been converted and was asked how he was doing. He said that there were two dogs fighting in him, one was good and the other was evil. He was then asked which one was winning. He replied; "the one I feed the most". That man understood more than most Christians today. What can we feed on to insure that the right dog wins? The answer can be found in Philippians 4:8 ***"Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is of good repute, if there is any excellence and if anything worthy of praise, let your mind dwell on these things."*** You see; after you become a Christian, you need to pay very close attention to your diet. How does the menu, found in Philippians 4, compare with the sewage that pours forth from the one eyed god that so many Christians worship at today. Can you find even one thing that fits into the menu

for a healthy Christian diet? The computer statement that says, "Garbage in garbage out" also applies to the Christian life.

The self esteem doctrine is just a part of the psychologizing of Christianity. In our seminaries and Bible schools, the students often learn more about the doctrines of Freud and Jung than they do the doctrines of Paul and Peter. The fact that the fathers of modern psychology were atheists and even occult members should give us cause for concern when it comes to using their ideas to build doctrine on. Jung said that he got many of his insights from his spirit guide. This does not mean that some of the things that these men and others have discovered can't be helpful, but we need to be very careful. These men believed in the perfectibility of man. This is a direct contradiction to the Word of God. Since the basic assumptions about the nature of man are wrong, the conclusions drawn from those assumptions will also be faulty. The truth of the matter is that psychology is simply too weak to do us much good. When I was a poor lost sinner on a one way road to Hell, I didn't need a psychologist I needed a savior. I saw the day when my mother and dad, who had been divorced for 8 years, went to bed in separate rooms one night hating each other and were planning their wedding the next morning. Only Jesus can plant that kind of love in two hearts, and it lasted the rest of their lives. You could never Psychologize that into being. We place our little self esteem Band-Aids over the cancer of our sin and say "See; it's all gone".

I submit to you that the self esteem doctrine, not only does not contribute to the proper self image of a Christian, but , in fact, mitigates against it. I further submit to you that it also hinders a Christian in living an overcoming, victorious life. The way to live an overcoming life is to recognize that our problem is not self esteem but **SIN**. If you are envious of someone because he has more than you have you may feel inferior to that person. Your problem is not your inferior feeling but your sin of envy. you need to acknowledge it, confess it to God, repent of it, and forsake it and go on in victory. If you concentrate on your self esteem and even if you can raise your self esteem by some mental adjustment, what have you accomplished? Have you not become your own savior and, as such, guilty of idolatry?

The Christian life was never intended to be lived outside of the power of the Holy Spirit. The fact is that Jesus requires us to do things that are impossible for us to do. Let me give you some examples. In Matthew 5:48 we read, "Therefore ***you are to be perfect, as your***

heavenly Father is perfect." Can you be perfect? No! But you can bring your imperfections to Jesus and he will give you His perfection. So that, positionally, before God, you are perfect. The self esteem approach to this would be; don't worry about it, you are no worse than the next fellow. What about Matthew 6:14-15 ? It says; ***"For if you forgive men for their transgressions, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men, then your Father will not forgive your transgressions."*** What if you simply can't forgive someone. What if it is a man that raped and murdered your little daughter ? Can you forgive that man ? Absolutely not !! What does this do to your self esteem ? How do you reconcile all of this ? If you are focused on your self, I think that it will eat you up and start to destroy you. You will go to counseling and be told that you have every right to be angry at that evil man. But what about the requirement of Jesus in Matthew 6:14-15 ? So what SHOULD you do ? You go to Jesus and tell Him that you know that He requires that you forgive that man. You confess the truth; that if it were not for Christ, you could just as well be that man. You confess your sin of non-forgiveness and repent of it. You confess that it is not within your power to forgive him. Then; as a sheer act of your will you say Jesus; I forgive that man but you will have to make it real because I can't. And He will make it real. When that happens you will not have any problems with your self image. But if you focus on your self esteem, the problem will never get solved and you will not live in the victory that you could be living in. Why is it that Christians understand that they can not save themselves and must come to Jesus and confess their utter inability to do so and ask him to take their sins by faith, but fail to see that this is also the way they handle all of the impossible conditions in their lives?

The trouble with focusing on self esteem is the fact that low self esteem is not the problem but only the indication that there is a problem. So if our efforts are spent in trying to raise our self esteem, we will never deal with the problem. If you are a murderer, you should not feel good about yourself. A murderer with high self esteem is even more dangerous because he sees nothing wrong with what he does. A person with high self esteem is not likely to see a need to come to Christ to have his sins forgiven. To concentrate on your self esteem is like going to the doctor because you are sick. The doctor takes your temperature and says, "you have a fever of 103". You ask what he can do about it and the doctor says, "we will get a thermometer that will

read 98.6". Changing the thermometer will not make you well any more than raising your self esteem will deal with your problems. I don't have to worry about my self esteem as long as my Christ esteem is right. If I see my fallen nature and know that in me there is no good thing, then I don't have to go through some mental gymnastics to make me feel good. All I need to do is come to Christ and confess my faults and sins to Him and I can go forth in victory. It is no surprise to Jesus that we would fail and it should be no surprise to us either. To recognize that we are morally bankrupt and so is everyone else, is to set us free from the self esteem bondage. You see, if we think that we are basically good, then when we do or think something evil, we feel as though we have failed. This kind of failure then leads to a low self esteem and then we have to psych our self up again to do better the next time. I think that is why so many Christians are on this emotional roller coaster. Self esteem is an emotion, and since we can not control our emotions, that means that those who are controlled by their self esteem are actually out of control. The Bible tells us in Galatians 5 that one of the attributes that the Holy Spirit gives is self control.

Let me show you the destructive way the self esteem doctrine works in the public schools. The teachers and administration are convinced that children will not do bad things if they only have a good self esteem. So little Egbert does something bad in his class and, since all discipline has been taken away from teachers, he is sent to see the principal. The principal says to himself, "If Egbert didn't have such a low self esteem he wouldn't do these bad things." So the principal tells little Egbert what a fine child he is and gives him a piece of candy in an effort to raise his self esteem, and sends him back to class. Now Egbert knew that he had done wrong and his conscience backed that belief, but the principal didn't seem to be convinced and after all he was the head expert in the entire school. As time goes by and this is repeated over many times Egberts conscience becomes seared; nothing becomes wrong. Add to this the teaching that there is no right and wrong but only what is right for you and you have the makings of a psychopathic criminal.

What we believe about the basic nature of man is of the utmost importance. If we believe that man is basically good and that we can perfect him by changing his environment, we will always be confused about what we see around us. When you start with a lie as a basic premise it is impossible to arrive at a conclusion that is true. When man does not acknowledge God in his heart, we can expect certain

things to result. His actions will be predictable. In Genesis 6:5 we read, "***And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.***" This was just before the flood. Are you shocked at some of the crimes that you see on the news? You shouldn't be. This is natural man acting out what is in his heart by nature. When Adam sinned, he received a fallen nature and we have inherited that nature. As the laws and society become more permissive, man is restrained less and less and we see more and more of his true, uninhibited nature. That is why "religion" doesn't work; because it can't change the basic nature of man. Only Jesus Christ can do that. I hear people say that they came to Christ at an early age and they didn't have too much sin to repent of. In a way, that may be true. But don't forget that you had just as black a heart as the worst sinner that ever lived and, given the chance and the time, you were just as apt to commit his most disgusting crime as he was.

This country is in a little different position than the countries of Europe. The Europeans have drifted away from God over a period of years. The United States has taken a position of hostility against God. This has set us up for judgment. When a people defy God you can expect to see certain things. Let me see if I can explain.

If you could take a black and white photograph of the nature of God; then take the negative of that picture, turn it upside down and backward, you would have a picture of the people who have spit in the face of God. So that black becomes white, white becomes black, up becomes down, down becomes up, right becomes left and left becomes right. This will be true of the basic truths of God. Let me give you some examples. God says that man is responsible for his actions. This society says "it's not your fault, it's your parents, your neighborhood, your circumstances." God says that there are certain things that are wrong. This society says that it's all based on circumstances and what is right for you. God says that he will not tolerate the shedding of innocent blood, thus we have abortion. God says that homosexuality is an abomination, thus we have gay pride and gay rights. I could go on and on but you get the idea. Does it seem that people are speaking a different language than you are? They should be, if you are a Christian. You will not understand their thinking and they won't understand yours. That is natural. You should get worried if it is not that way. If you want to understand what to expect now and in the days to come, read Romans 1:21-32; "***for even***

though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four footed animals and crawling creatures. Therefore God gave them over in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, that their bodies might be dishonored among them. For they exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshipped and served the creature rather than the creator, who is blessed forever, Amen. For this reason God gave them over to degrading passions; for their women exchanged the natural function for that which is unnatural, and in the same way also the men abandoned the natural function of the woman and burned in their desire toward one another, men with men committing indecent acts and receiving in their own persons the due penalty for their error. And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, arrogant, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, without understanding, untrustworthy, unloving, unmerciful; and, although they know the ordinance of God, that those who practice such things are worthy of death, they not only do the same, but also give hearty approval to those who practice them." This is how people act when they have rejected God. Oh but , you say, the surveys show that 90% of Americans believe in God. All I ask is what kind of god do they believe in ? If you asked them about their god you would soon see that it is not the God of the Bible.

In order to see the world as God does, we need to understand the nature of God and the nature of man. I think that the prominent place that Psychology has in the Church today helps to distort both.

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