

The Christian Perception of Self

The vision each of us has of himself or herself is the most important of our perspectives and attitudes.

We need to realise that our self-attitude will always play a part in affecting our other attitudes, always colouring the way we see every part of reality.

Each of us acts out our self-image.

For example, if I perceive myself as a loser, I act like a loser. I approach each new person or situation with a loser mentality.

All my expectations are coloured by this “*loser*” perception of myself.

As we know, the expectation is often the “*mother*” of the result.

So when with this “*loser*” attitude we do actually lose or fail, we are confirmed all the more in our original self-defeating attitude.

There is a story in American Indian folklore that illustrates this truth very clearly.

According to the legend, an Indian brave came upon an eagle’s egg which had somehow fallen unbroken from an eagle’s nest. Unable to climb up to this nest, the brave put the egg in the nest of a prairie chicken nearby, where it was hatched by the brooding mother hen. The fledgling eagle, looking at the other prairie chickens and did what they did. He clawed and scratched at the earth, pecked here and there for stray grains, now and then rising in a flutter a few feet above the earth and descending again. The eagle accepted and imitated the daily routine of the earthbound prairie chickens all of his life.

Then this legend continues that one day an eagle flew over the brood of prairie chickens. The now aging eagle, who still thought he was a prairie chicken, looked up in awed admiration as the great eagle soared through the sky.

“*What is that?*” he gasped in astonishment.

One old prairie chicken replied, “*I have seen one of those before. That is an eagle, the strongest and most magnificent of all the birds. But don’t you ever dream that you could be like that. You’re like the rest of us prairie chickens.*”

So, shackled with this belief, the eagle lived and died thinking he was a prairie chicken.

Our lives are shaped by the way we perceive ourselves.

These all-important attitudes by which we perceive and evaluate ourselves tell us who we are and describe the appropriate behaviour for such a person.

The attitude determines not only how we will act but also how other human beings will treat us.

Matthew 22:34-40 [NIV] “*Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?” Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.*”

As Jesus Christ stated as part of the greatest commandment, we cannot love others if we do not love ourselves.

John 13:34 [NIV] *“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.”*

It is crucial to realise that our attitude towards self regulates our active capacity for loving others, and that includes God.

If our attitude towards self is crippling us, our capacity to love is proportionately diminished.

When we are hurting from a poor self-image all our attention to ourselves leaves us little freedom to reach out to others in love and concern.

A simple thing like a toothache will diminish our availability for others; likewise the pain of a poor self-image will leave us empty of strength or desire to reach out in love towards others.

To love myself I must try to recognise and appreciate the unique gifts that God has given me.

Make a list of these gifts from the colour of our eyes to our love of music, or the instinctive compassion we feel for those we see suffering.

When we feel down and depressed get the list out and read it.

Or if we have contact with others with a poor self-image tell them about your list and if they express astonishment or disbelief show them and let them see our list.

If people offer us a compliment ask them in a humorous way to expand on it so that it will help us to be more grateful to God who has been so good to us in giving us that gift.

At this point you may be thinking or asking the question, “Can a person love himself or herself too much?”

I would like to suggest that the answer, with one important qualification, is most probably “No”.

Self-centredness is **not** the result of self love, but is the product of pain, the result of a poor self-image.

A self-centred, selfish person has an ache of emptiness inside.

They try to fill this emptiness with such things as bragging, name dropping, posing as an authority on all questions great and small.

What may look like an excess of self-love in fact represents an absence of self-love.

Luke 1:46-49 [NIV] *“And Mary said: “My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Saviour, for he has been mindful of the humble state of his servant. **From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me, holy is his name.**”*

This I feel is a perfect expression of humility.

This expresses a grateful appreciation of God’s gifts.

It acknowledges that all God’s gifts are pure gifts.

It expresses the realisation that we have **no** claim on God: all the gifts we have are the result of His goodness, **not** the result of our worthiness.

It acknowledges that we are indeed blessed by our Heavenly Father.

There is only one you.

True appreciation of your personal uniqueness offers us freedom from the constant pain of the comparison game.

Deuteronomy 32:10 [NIV] *“In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; **he guarded him as the apple of his eye,**”*

“Apple of His [God’s] eye” – means the centre of His attention.

God has the capacity to focus on each of us as if we were the only human being that exists.

Isaiah 49:14-16 [NIV] *“But Zion said, “The LORD has forsaken me, the Lord has forgotten me.” “Can a mother forget the baby at her breast and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, **I will not forget you!** See, I have engraved you on the palms of my hands; your walls are ever before me.”*

We are constantly in the thoughts of our Creator God and our protection [walls] physically, mentally and spiritually are His concern.

Each of us are unique; there will only ever be one person like us.

God tells each of us, *“You have always had a special warm place in My heart.”*

“You have been given an important role to play in My world.”

“You have a unique message to deliver a unique act of love to bestow, entrusted exclusively to the one and only you.”

Matthew 5:48 [NIV] *“Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”*

A misunderstanding of this statement can become an intolerable burden.

The Greek word translated “perfect” is “*tēlēiōs*” which comes from the root word “*tēlōs*” which means “*reaching the point or goal aimed for.*”

As each of us are unique, that goal will be different for each of us.

When I finish writing this article I will be “perfect” for I will have completed the task God set me and arrived at my goal.

God is **not** asking us the impossible, only He is perfect and we can never become God, we are finite, and have a beginning: God is infinite and has never had a beginning.

Isaiah 64:8 [NIV] *“Yet, O LORD, you are our Father. We are the clay, you are the potter; we are all the work of your hand.”*

We are clay and God is as superior to us as the potter is to the lump of clay he is working with.

Isaiah 55:6-9 [NIV] *“Seek the LORD while he may be found; call on him while he is near. Let the wicked forsake his way and the evil man his thoughts. Let him turn to the LORD, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God, for he will freely pardon. **“For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways,” declares the LORD.** “As the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”*

We can never attain to the level of God’s intellect and purity.

A healthy Christian attitude towards self-image is to accept the human condition of fragility.

As a child of God he desires a loving relationship with us.

God desires that we see ourselves walking through life hand-in-hand with His Son Jesus Christ.

Feeling glad to be who we are, knowing that He loves and accepts us as we are.

God also loves us so much He wants us as a result of this intimate relationship we become more like Him every day, so that we can share His joy of life.

To become like the child who reflects the character of their parents.

Be like the moon that bathed in the light of the sun [Jesus Christ] reflects the light of love in this dark world of sin.

That is the goal God has set us.

That is the vision we are to reflect in our life.