

Parenting from Proverbs

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Session 5

In this session, we want to talk about the whole self-love and self-esteem cult that has greatly influenced our thinking as parents and how we approach our children. This ideology has also affected the thinking of our children.

You can see this influence in a lot of homeschool literature, Christian school materials, and especially in public school curriculums over the past 60-70 years. A major ideological storm has swept through Christianity, subtly reshaping the theological landscape of churches. While conservative, Bible-believing churches fought off the frontal attack of liberalism and higher criticism, an even more pervasive theological virus crept in through the back door. This has rewritten how we view child development and anthropology, shifting it toward a narcissistic, self-focused, psychologized belief system.

This ideology is so pervasive that some Christians become passionate, even hostile, when it is questioned. I've had people react strongly to the suggestion that this belief is unbiblical.

Consider this example: ***Time Magazine*** once reported on a standardized math test given to 13-year-olds from six different countries. The Korean students performed the best, and the American students performed the worst. But when asked to rate their own mathematical abilities, 77% of Korean students said they were not good at math, while the American students, who scored the lowest, rated themselves the highest. This is significant—our students are doing poorly in math but feel really good about themselves.

This self-love, self-esteem ideology comes from a belief system that rejects a biblical view of anthropology. It stems from theories promoted by Alfred Adler, Abraham Maslow, and others, who sold the American public a needs-based theory. Adler proposed that from birth to age six, children develop an inferiority complex, which they spend the rest of their lives compensating for through self-realization and self-actualization. This theory influenced Christian psychologists in the 1960s and '70s, and its effects are still seen in the church today.

This ideology has even infiltrated our hymns.

Compare the older hymn [*When I Survey the Wondrous Cross*](#), which says, “Pour contempt on all my pride,” with the more modern chorus *They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love*, which includes the line, “We'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride.”

That's a huge shift in focus. The older hymns emphasized humility, while the newer ones often focus on maintaining pride and dignity.

This focus on self-love has also affected preaching. Today, many preachers avoid talking about sin and guilt because people want to feel good about themselves. But biblical preaching that exposes sin often makes us feel guilty, and that's not necessarily bad. In our culture, there's a desire for church to be a place where people feel good about themselves, which explains the popularity of preachers like Joel Osteen.

This shift has also impacted how we approach child-rearing and education. Many parents and teachers are afraid to discipline children, fearing it will hurt their self-image. Christian schools even send children on retreats to “learn to pat themselves on the back” and feel good about themselves. This reluctance to confront sin and discipline children undermines biblical child-rearing principles.

Let me introduce you to Lisa, a young lady who came to me for counseling. She often felt depressed and said she hated herself. Lisa was told by friends and a psychologist that she had low self-esteem and needed to learn to love herself more. She described herself as inferior, miserable, and unloved. Lisa's self-concept was zero, and she even felt that God probably didn't like her.

I asked Lisa, “Why do you hate yourself?” She listed several reasons: she was too tall, too short, too fat, too skinny, not athletic enough, and so on. After she finished, I told her, “If you really hated yourself, you'd be happy about all these things because you wouldn't think you deserved any better.” That stopped her in her tracks. She had never considered that before.

The Bible never says that low self-esteem is man's problem. In fact, the Bible teaches that man loves himself too much, and this excessive self-love makes us miserable when life doesn't meet our expectations.

Now let's turn to Matthew 22:36-40, a passage often used to support self-love.

In this passage, Jesus commands us to love the Lord with all our heart and to love our neighbor as ourselves. Some interpret this to mean that we need to love ourselves before we can love others or God.

But Jesus isn't teaching three commands—He's teaching two: love God and love others. The assumption is that we already love ourselves. Jesus is saying that we need to love others with the same intensity and passion with which we already love ourselves.

Ephesians 5:28-29 reinforce this idea. Paul assumes that husbands already love their own bodies. He says that if husbands loved their wives with the same care, they give to themselves, they would have great marriages. No one ever hated his own flesh, but he nourishes and cherishes it.

The same is true when it comes to loving others—we are to treat others the way we naturally treat ourselves.

Finally, let's talk about self-hate. People often claim to hate themselves, but in reality, they are expressing dissatisfaction with their circumstances, not true self-hate. When people say they hate themselves, they are often seeking sympathy, shifting responsibility, or expressing anger over their circumstances. The Bible calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow Christ (Luke 9:23). This is the true biblical response to self-centeredness—not self-love or self-esteem, but self-denial and Christ-centeredness.

Scripture References

1. Matthew 22:36-40

“Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?” And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest and first commandment. And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

2. Ephesians 5:28-29

"In the same way husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. For no one ever hated his own flesh, but nourishes and cherishes it, just as Christ does the church."

3. Luke 9:23

"And he said to all, 'If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me.'"

4. Genesis 1:27

"So, God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

5. Genesis 9:6

"Whoever sheds the blood of man, by man shall his blood be shed, for God made man in his own image."

6. James 3:9

"With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God."