

MBC - 3/3/2019 - Pastor Doug Thompson
“Looking In the Mirror”
(What is a Christian self-image?)

If the Lord wills, we will be starting a new series in the Book of Acts in about 3 weeks. Very excited about beginning that adventure. But before we jump into that study I want to take a couple of Sundays to answer a question—

- Romans 12:1-3 ¹I appeal to you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. ²Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. ³For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Awhile back Janice had a conversation with a dear friend of hers who asked her this question: “How does God want us to see ourselves? *How should we think about ourselves?*”

We know what the world says: “Think highly of yourself. Love yourself, you’re a winner!” One man said, “Low self-esteem is like driving through life with your hand-break on.” The Buddha said: “You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your own love and affection.” Makes you want to sit in lotus position, doesn’t it?

I went to the Scriptures to find an answer: If you are a Christians, what should you see when you look in the mirror? How should you feel about the person you see? How important is it that you know yourself, and understand your motives and the inner workings of your own heart?

I.e., What is a *Christian* self-image? We’re going to look at a lot of Scriptures, but let me sum what we’re going to find in God’s Word—

- 1.) “Self” should not be a major concern or preoccupation for God’s children. In fact, we strive to be like the Lord Jesus who was the most *self-less* Person who ever lived! When we *do* think about ourselves we should see what God sees: helpless sinners who have been sovereignly chosen to receive undeserved forgiveness, adoption, and grace beyond measure.

Paul gave us the Christian’s self-image when he said in—

- 1 Corinthians 15:10 “By the grace of God I am what I am.”

Isn’t that great?: “Whatever I am, whoever I am, is only by God’s grace! I’m not a self-made man, I’m a new man in Christ!” And Paul was content with that, wasn’t he?

2.) But we won’t appreciate God’s grace and mercy toward us until we grasp how wretched and unworthy we were to receive His grace. So what should I see when I look in the mirror? *An undeserving nothing who has received everything in Christ.* Someone said it like this: **I will not sing of God’s amazing grace until I realize that it saved a *wretch* like me.**

So let’s get started.

I. The Christian’s basic posture: low.

- Rom.12:3: For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you *not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think*, but to think with sober judgment, each accord-

ing to the measure of faith that God has assigned.

Have an accurate, realistic view of yourself, and that means to guard against self-exaltation, self-importance, because it's always our tendency to think more highly of ourselves than we ought. Paul says a few verses later—

- Rom 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. (And this is what is required for harmony with one another:) Do not be haughty, but associate with the lowly. *Never be wise in your own sight.*

The word for “haughty” is literally to be “high-minded” = a very positive self-esteem! The Holy Spirit says, “that’s a *bad* thing, not a *good* thing!” What it really means is that you see yourself as higher - *better* than others. “Oh, I would never think that!” But you *do* when you and your desires are more important than others and their desires.

This is the enemy of *harmony* in any relationship: Pride, being “wise in your own sight” - looking in the mirror and seeing someone who is better, smarter, and more competent than others. If that’s your “self-esteem,” then you will believe that you should have things your way. Because you are right more often than others. Your opinions should carry more weight. And James said—

- James 3:16 ¹⁶For where jealousy and *selfish ambition* exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice.

Don’t you see that?

God calls His children to be the opposite - we are to be “*low-minded.*” There is a Gk. word for low-minded that we find often in the NT. It’s often translated as *humility*—

- Acts 20:19 Paul described his ministry in Ephesus: ¹⁹“serving the Lord with all *humility* and with tears and with trials that happened to me through the plots of the Jews. (This is St. Paul!)”
- Colossians 3:12 ¹²Put on then, as God’s chosen ones, holy and beloved, compassionate hearts, kindness, *humility*, meekness, and patience, (and none of this will happen if you really think you are better than others.)
- 1 Peter 5:5 ⁵Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. *Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”*

Not *better* than others, *lower* than others; *beneath* others. I want to read you a familiar verse from the NASB—

- Philippians 2:3-4 ³Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind (Gk. = low-minded - a humble self-image. Now watch how this affects relationships) regard one another as *more important than yourselves*; (and this is how you do this--) ⁴do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others.

Wow - really? You are more important than me? That’s the way I am to treat you. Now maybe you really are smarter than other people; wiser, better at basketball; I used to be a really good trumpet player - those days are gone! But none of that matters. Whoever you are, no matter how smart or gifted, or right you are, God calls you as His child to “voluntarily, subordinate yourself to others, so that you treat them as more important than you - by putting their needs ahead of your own!”

- Just the way Jesus did. He was the Son of God! But He laid aside all the perks of being God to lay down His life for us. *He treated us as though we were more important than Him.* Amazing. Now you do the same. That's what it means to be low-minded.

“So what was Jesus’ self-image? Did Jesus have good self-esteem?” You can’t read the Gospels and even ask such a question. That was a total non-issue to Jesus. He was here for others! I believe the only time Jesus ever even described Himself was in Matthew 11:29 where He used two adjectives:

- ²⁹Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am *gentle* and *lowly* in heart, and you will find rest for your souls.

Gentle, lowly - and that was the Son of God speaking! But that is how Jesus saw Himself.

You want to read about positive self-esteem in the Scriptures? You find it in Isa. 14 out of the mouth of Satan as he seeks to usurp the place of God—

- Isaiah 14:13-15 ¹³You said in your heart, ‘*I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high; I will sit on the mount of assembly in the far reaches of the north; ¹⁴I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High.*’ ¹⁵But you are brought down to Sheol, to the far reaches of the pit.
- “I will, I will!” Then see a Garden where the Son of God is crying out, “Not My will, but Thy will!” Satan sought to exalt himself to heaven, Jesus was exalted in heaven, but became the lowest of men, lower still, He gave His own life for His sheep and went to the grave for them.

We are to follow our Lord Jesus and humble ourselves, put ourselves below others. Christian self-image is to be low-minded. But now I want to back up and answer a more basic question—

II. Should we even be looking in the mirror?

Let me show you a fascinating passage on the way Paul saw himself—

- **1Co 4:1-4** This is how one should regard us, as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me.

The Corinthian church was divided over the ministers of the Gospel! They had made rock stars out of Paul, Peter, Apollos, and others. Paul says, “What are you doing? This is how to think about us: we are the lowliest servants of Jesus Christ, and we are simply the caretakers of the Gospel that has been entrusted to us.

The word for servant here is *huperetes* - lit. an “under-rower” those slaves in the bottom of the ship, chained together working the oars. You’ve seen this in the movies: the guy is standing over them, cracking the whip, “Row harder ye wretches!”

- And the Old English word for steward was *sty-warden* = a pig-keeper!

Now see what Paul is saying: “Think about the greatest preachers and apostles as galley slaves and pig-keepers! All we are doing is following orders from our Lord.” How ridiculous to make superstars out of such men.

And whatever others thought about Paul's ministry, didn't really matter to Paul—

- 1Co 4:3 But with me it is a very *small* thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court.

He wasn't being cynical, he just meant that the evaluation of men had little value, because people are fallible judges of other fallible people—

- And Paul had experienced this: Do you remember what happened when Paul and Barnabas arrived in Lystra. After they performed a miracle, the crowds began screaming: "The gods have become men!" They called Barnabus *Zeus*, and Paul, *Hermes*, and they tried to offer sacrifices to them! Then, when they preached the Gospel to them, they changed their minds, stoned Paul, and left him for dead. So much for the evaluation of men. Paul didn't put his confidence in the judgment of others. He didn't lose sleep worrying about his approval rating in the polls.

And he goes on to say, v.3: ". . . *In fact, I do not even judge myself.*"

Now back to our question: "Should we even be looking in the mirror - analyzing and evaluating ourselves?" Paul's answer is, "Why? I'm just as lousy a judge of myself as everyone else! I'm not necessarily fair and balanced when it comes to me. I might give myself an A+ but 'I am not by this acquitted.' So I don't spend much time primping in front of the mirror."

And many Christians would have the opposite problem and incorrectly see themselves as inferior and worthless—

- 1 Corinthians 12:15-16 ¹⁵If the foot should say, "Because I am not a hand, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body. ¹⁶And if the ear should say, "Because I am not an eye, I do not belong to the body," that would not make it any less a part of the body.

Some see themselves higher than they should, some see themselves lower - but both groups are spending a lot of time in front of the mirror - right? But what did Paul say?

- "*I do not even judge myself*" - that is amazing! How many Christians do you know who are constantly evaluating their own motives and actions, and second-guessing every decision? They are so worried that they are missing the mark, missing "the center of God's will." They suffer from "**Analysis paralysis!**"

That's not the way God wants His children to live. We live by faith - not by introspection. That means we do the best we can to walk according to God's Word, and then we *relax* and leave the results in His hands.

- Take parenting as an example: So many moms especially are wracked with guilt, "Oh, maybe we should have fed our kids differently, sent them to a different school - oh, we never should have let them play with so-and-so. . ." That's living by doubt, not faith. And you need to come to Sara's conference on March 16th! Maybe you did the very best you could with what you had. God has plunked His children down into a very confusing, complicated world and He just expects us to trust and obey, and not fret over the results because they are in His sovereign hands!

Keith Green said, "You just keep doin' your best, and pray that it's blest - and Jesus takes care of the rest!"

*That's why Paul says, "I don't spend a lot of time judging myself!" Ah, but what does he say

next? 1Co 4:4 “For I am not aware of anything against myself.” Oh, so even the Apostle Paul couldn’t stay away from that mirror, huh? If he didn’t judge himself at all, he couldn’t say that he wasn’t aware of anything against himself.

It’s impossible for us *not* to examine ourselves. Jesus commands us to examine our own eyes for logs before we march off to judge others, right? Of course we look in the mirror and try to spot things that are contrary to the fruit of the Spirit - are we walking in obedience, and love? But it should never become an obsession, because we just don’t have the equipment to really see what’s inside. Listen to Jeremiah:

- Jer 17:9 "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; *Who can understand it?*

A: Not us. We are lousy judges of our own hearts. And think about this: if we aren’t even able to understand our own sinful hearts, how much less are we able to judge the hearts of others! Amen? We see in a mirror dimly! So Paul goes on to say—

- 1Co 4:5 Therefore do not pronounce judgment before the time, [on others, and even on ourselves!] before the Lord comes, who will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart. Then each one will receive his commendation from God.

I like that! No condemnation for those who are in Christ, only *commendation* from God for what He has done through us. So Who knows us? Who has the omniscience to judge our hearts and bring to light the things now hidden in darkness - and even disclose the purposes of our hearts? The Lord! Let me read what Jeremiah said again—

- Jer 17:9-10 "The heart is more deceitful than all else And is desperately sick; Who can understand it? *"I, the LORD, search the heart, I test the mind,* Even to give to each man according to his ways, According to the results of his deeds.

We don’t know our own hearts, we can’t, but God does. What did David pray at the end of Ps. 139, that wonderful Psalm about God searching us and knowing us? “Search me, O David, and know my own heart!” No! “*Search me, O God, and know my heart, try me and know my thoughts, and see if there be any grievous way in me.*” “God, You take a look - you judge what’s in there ‘cause I’m not good at this!” If you are concerned about your heart and your motives, pray and ask God to do the searching, OK? And I can tell you how God does the searching - are you ready? —

- Heb 4:12 For the word of God is living and active, sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and of spirit, of joints and of marrow, and *discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart.*

You must spend time with the Lord, in His Word if you want to know what’s going on inside. Are you doing that?

But oh, notice this - notice this: even God hasn’t promised to tell us everything He sees in our hearts until Christ returns! And *then*, He “*will bring to light the things now hidden in darkness and will disclose the purposes of the heart.*”

- So what? So don’t you pronounce the final judgment on your own heart or the hearts of others until then! And until then, stay humble, stay in His Word, and walk by faith.

Does that sound like the end of the sermon? It’s not.

So let's ask Paul: "Paul, surely you have heard about how important it is to have a positive self-image. I mean we won't be self-actualized human beings unless we have healthy self-esteem. What say you?"

- And Paul would say, "What's that? Oh, I'm sorry, I had my mind on the ministry again . . . Self-image? Yeah, I've heard of that. Honestly, I don't have time to think about it. The truth is, I don't care much what others think about me, and I don't care what *I* think about me! I care what *God* thinks about me. He knows me inside and out, and I want to please Him. One day He will tell me what was really in my heart. It will all be revealed. Until then, if you press me on this self-image thing, here is my self-image: I'm a galley slave and a pig-keeper. The least of all the saints, the least of the Apostles, and unworthy even to be called an Apostle. How's that?"

Here is Paul's "self-image"—

- Galatians 2:20 ²⁰I have been crucified with Christ. *It is no longer I who even live*, but Christ who lives in me. And the life I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.

So here is the bottom line: If you search the Scriptures, the whole question of self-image or self-esteem is not there - because it's not to be our concern. If anything, it's a pitfall to be avoided! We are not to be preoccupied with "self." We have no reason to be staring into the mirror.

Do you know where we find the first mirror in the Bible? In Genesis, Adam and Eve are in the Garden, walking with God, naked and unashamed. But when they sinned, they hid from God, and when He asked why they were hiding, what did Adam say, "*I was afraid because I was naked.*" And what did God say? "Who told you that you were naked?" No, there wasn't a literal mirror in the garden, but the moment man fell, self-consciousness was born. Self-preoccupation, self-importance, self-love and self-will - those were all the result of sin entering the human race.

Do you see the irony? What secular society say is the solution - self - is really the problem!

III. What should we see?

So what should we see when we look in the mirror? How should we see ourselves? Let's turn back to Rom.12:

A. See yourself in light of the mercies of God.

Back to Romans 12:3 he says "Think of yourself with sober judgment", and that would mean accurately, biblically, as God sees you. And how does God see His children? V.1: He sees us in light of *His mercies* - look back with at some of the mercies of God—

- 3:22: He sees you clothed in "the righteousness of God through faith in Jesus Christ."
- 3:24,25: You are "justified—acquitted of all of your sins—by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus."
- Romans 4:7-8 God says this about you: ⁷"Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; ⁸blessed is the man against whom the Lord will not count his sin."

When you look in the mirror and all you see is a failure; someone who repeats the same sins - God is not even keeping record because they were all forgiven in Christ.

- 4:13: God sees you as a co-heir with Abraham of all the promises He made to him - and He promised Abe the world to come - the new heaven and new earth.
- 5:1: He sees you at peace with Him through faith in Christ.
- 5:5: He sees His love poured into your hearts through the Holy Spirit.
- 6:11: He sees you as dead to sin, but alive to Him through Jesus Christ.

Jump over to ch.8:

- 8:1: He sees you as no longer under any condemnation for you sins.
- 8:29: He sees you as one He chose and predestined out of His own love and mercy to be His own, before time began, one who will be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, and v.30: He sees you as though you were already glorified!

And nothing will ever separate you from His love. You have been born again by His Spirit and adopted into the family of God as a joint-heir of Christ. You are a new creation in Christ, indwelt by the Trinity, the temple of the living God, You are a partaker of the divine nature, higher in status than any angel.

This is the way God sees you, right now because He has joined you to His Son. You look in the mirror and see all your warts and blemishes, God looks at you and sees the beauty and perfection of His Son! That's who you should see when you look in the mirror.

B. . . . the undeserved mercies of God!

But don't miss this: Mercy means that even though you didn't deserve it, didn't earn it, and will never be worthy of it, God lavished all of this on you as a free gift of His love. You deserved punishment, but instead, God gave you the riches of His Son. Mercy - is what makes all that we have in Christ so precious! And His grace so amazing.

- I don't want you to miss the connection between seeing yourself in the light of God's mercy, and not thinking too highly of yourself. The two are inseparable. Let me explain:

If you follow the world's thinking and pursue self-esteem and a positive self image, it pulls the rug out from under God's mercy: People who are patting themselves on their backs because of how wonderful they are, don't want mercy - they want *recognition!* They don't want a *gift*, they want their *reward!*

- But Jesus said "Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick." (Mat 9:12)

But sick people get to see the Doctor - and this Doctor heals all who come to Him. And He said—

- "Blessed - happy! - are the *poor* in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven."

Low is the way to go in Jesus' Kingdom. And when you know that when He saved you, He saved a wretch - you will sing of His Amazing Grace! "My Jesus, you did all of this - for me?"

I want to take you to one more passage that is kinda strange, but it brings all of this together. How should you and I see ourselves as Christians this morning?

- Luk 17:7-10 "Will any one of you who has a servant plowing or keeping sheep say to him when he has come in from the field, 'Come at once and recline at table? Will he not rather say to him, 'Prepare supper for me, and dress properly, and serve me while I eat and drink, and afterward you will eat and drink'? Does he thank the servant because he did what was commanded? So you also, when you have done all that you were commanded, say, 'We are unworthy servants; we have only done what was our duty.'"

If you are a Christian, that's you: just an unworthy servant. God doesn't owe you anything. You don't deserve anything. You are the lowest of the low. Do you get it? Let it sink in.

- Now think about what God has done for you in Christ: As unworthy as you are, He didn't just make you His servant, He adopted you as His son, as His daughter, made you a part of His family. And after serving the King of Kings, He doesn't make you to eat your crust of bread alone in the corner. Do you know what the Scriptures say? We sing it:

Then He'll call us home to heaven,
at His table we'll sit down;
Christ will gird Himself and serve us
with sweet manna all around.

A bunch of nothings who have been given *everything*.

So put your mirror in the closet. Just fix your eyes on Jesus, and you can leave yourself alone!

- Do you feel the freedom! It's like a massive weight is lifted from your shoulders. You feel . . . lighter. And it's not the keto diet. No. You are freed from the burden of *protecting* your ego, *pampering* your self-image, and constantly *pumping* up your self-esteem. You can rest in Christ, and be content to be a servant of Christ and a steward of the mysteries of God.

Does that sound good? And what will it do to your relationships with others when you don't have to be on top, in control, getting your way, winning the argument. What will happen when you die to self and consider others as more important than you?

This was from an e-mail a few years ago from my dear friend, Nilo Sanchez over in the Philippines—about something that happened at one of his pastor's conferences—

We have surprise from the Lord how powerful the gospel of grace is in the lives of sinners. Three of the pastors who attended the conference, Pastors Rey Panal, Bienvinido Fuentes, and Wilmer Falcon never knew each other prior to their being saved. Rey was the commander of the New Peoples Army, the communist rebels fighting against the Philippine govt. Bienvinido and Wilmer were both in the Philippine govt. army, airborne and special forces, respectively.

As they shared their testimonies at the graduation, we all realized that these three men had fought at the *same battle from the opposing sides*. They remembered the exact date and place and the names of those who were killed, and how they "escaped" deaths in amazing ways, not understanding God's hand keeping them. Since that battle, all three men were saved and as they were growing in the Lord they attended our classes in the Mobile School held in different places. They came to the Conference excited to get their Diploma in Theology and Ministry: the 3 among 30 graduates. Then they shared their stories. All of us were gasping at what came next - instead of hatred and anger there was love and forgiveness!! We smiled, burst into unspeakable joy - Christ won the battle of hearts and soul at Calvary! We gather the spoils in the mission field - we are brothers - more than blood brothers! One big family of God! What a glorious Savior we have - Christ Jesus our Lord!

These men “once were enemies, now they’re seated side-by-side at His Table, Jesus thank You!”

That’s the end of the sermon. Let’s pray while the worship team comes up–

➤ Nothing Without You