

Self-esteem. Feeling good about me. If only it were a virus we could catch like the colds that raced from person to person all winter.

Self esteem. We believe in it.

We will combat drug usage by building self esteem.

We will control teenage sex through building self esteem.

We will improve work habits and performance by enhanced self esteem.

Loving and respecting self. What parent among us will not race to distant soccer fields and swimming pools and basketball courts, ^{or water bases} in the hope that self esteem will be born there.

We will create the kind of children we have always dreamed of, the kind of society where there is no pain, the kind of world God should have made through improved self esteem.

But before we get too carried away, God has a story.

Once there was a man with some real self esteem. A credit to his mother and father, a credit to his community and synagogue, his name was Saul. Intelligent, respected, trained by the best teachers of his day, a Roman citizen at a time when citizenship was reserved for the elite. Saul knew the holy scriptures, God's law revealed there he kept perfectly. Later he would write that he was blameless as to righteousness before the law.

Not only was he a man of great faith, he was a man of action. He would not stand by and watch his culture and his faith be undermined. Followers of Jesus were attacking the very foundation of Israel's faith, claiming Jesus was Lord. God. There could be no greater threat to everything Saul believed.

He took it upon himself to destroy these blasphemers, these enemies of the true faith.

He was on his way to the city of Damascus to do just that when a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" He asked, "Who are you Lord?"

"I am Jesus whom you are persecuting." came the reply.

In that moment Saul was stripped of all self esteem. Everything he had believed in, everything he had built upon and counted upon, was exploded in those words.

If all his life had been building an account of service to God, now what had been his savings had become his debt. For all his deeds to destroy Jesus had not been for God but against God.

It would be like my working among you for eight and a half years and to in a moment find that my every word and deed were hated by God. It would be like finding out that after all that time and effort and sacrifice that what I had done to build up the church had destroyed the church.

It would be like a mother being told by her child that what the mother had done to help, had really harmed.

It would be like the manager of a business realizing that the policies intended to ensure a profitable future had really brought about disaster.

Who are you Lord?

I am Jesus whom you are persecuting.

In Saul there was no more self esteem, no more claim on God, nothing.

He was simply dead. No, he was still breathing, but everything he had been was gone.

Even his sight was gone.

He did not eat or drink for three days and three nights.

Then a person came with the word of God. "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit."

His sight was restored, he got up and was baptized, and he began to
proclaim Jesus saying, He is the Son of God.

Self esteem died. Christ esteem was born.

"It is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me." were now his words.

Sisters and Brothers, do we want this same death of our self esteem,
the resurrection of Christ esteem in us? Not a chance.

That Old Eve in us, that Old Adam in us is doing everything possible
to hang on and stay in control, to have an esteem of my own making.

But God has already held the funeral for that character. In your
baptism God drowned that old person. God raised up a Christ esteeming
person who lives by faith.

For God knows there is no hope for self produced self esteem, only death. But for
the Christ esteeming person there is life eternal, God's gift to you.

You are a child of God, ~~through Jesus Christ~~ ^{through Jesus Christ}. Christ gave
his life for you, gives you the promise of his presence, his eternal love,
Christ esteems you.