

## The Religion of Self-Worship

### Romans 12:1-16

It is not surprising the confusion that has arisen among Christians about self-love and self-esteem. At first glance, we seem to exemplify Christian principles. How can we “love our neighbors as ourselves” unless we love ourselves? How can we suffer from poor self-esteem if we are children of the King of kings? Though these ideas appear to be innocuous (harmless), if not actually Christian, they can represent the entry way to a view of ourselves as anti-God and anti-Christ. To despise oneself and to hate oneself are painful experiences. It is understandable when we despise ourselves, to yearn to discover something lovable about ourselves.

But is a “selfist” philosophy of high self-esteem the opposite of low self-esteem? If the words mean what they seem to mean, one would think so. Yet, we are taught a new perspective in the New Testament. The Christian ideal is not that we replace poor self-esteem with high self-esteem, but we replace it with realistic self-appraisal based on God’s love and how He has gifted us.

Romans can be divided up into two parts: 1) What to believe (1:1-11:36); and 2) How to behave (12:1-16:27). Paul gives clear practical guidelines for the believers in Rome and everywhere. The Christian life is not abstract theology unconnected with life, but it has practical implications that will affect how we choose to behave each day.

It is not enough merely to know the gospel; we must let it transform our lives and let God impact every aspect of our lives. James said it this way, “But be ye doers of the word and not just hearers only deceiving your own selves” (James 1:22).

The Scofield Study Bible divides Romans 12 into the following subsections:

- Consecration (Romans 12:1-2)
- Service (Romans 12:3-8)
- The Christians and those within (Romans 12:9- 16)
- The Christian and those without (Romans 12:17-13:7)

**Self-esteem** —1) a confidence and satisfaction in oneself; self-respect; 2) Self-conceit (an exaggerated opinion of one’s own qualities or abilities); vanity

**Self-appraisal**—an act or instance of evaluating one’s own worth, significance or status.  
Appraise—to set a value on, to estimate the amount of.

**Question 1.** What do you think is the difference between high self-esteem and a realistic self-appraisal? (Give examples of each)

Answer: In and of itself, high self-esteem can be a very good quality or trait to have. However, too much self-esteem can be the gateway of arrogance. Thinking we are better than we really are and better than others. A realistic self-appraisal is giving an honest account of our strength and weaknesses.

**Read Romans 12:1-8.**

**Question 2.** According to verses 1-3, how should we view ourselves if we are trying to avoid “the pattern of this world” (verse 2)?

Answer: We need to be transformed by the renewing of our minds, and focus on that which is good, acceptable and perfect will of God.

**Question 3.** Follow Paul’s argument in verses 4-8. Why should we not think more highly of ourselves than we ought?

Answer: We are all members of the body of Christ, and we all have different functions (offices). We need each other. By the grace of God, we have different gifts given to us.

God gives us gifts so we can build up His Church. To use them effectively we must: (1) realize that all gifts come from God; (2) understand that not everybody has the same gifts; (3) know who we are and what we do best (honest appraisal); (4) dedicate our gifts to God’s service and not to our personal success; (5) be willing to utilize our gifts wholeheartedly, not holding back anything from God’s service.

**Question 4.** How might Paul’s description here help you obey the command in verse 3? How is the description here different from what you see in popular views of self-esteem today?

Answer: Knowing that God has gifted us to do His service and will, should bring about some humility. Self-esteem, confidence in one’s own ability or one’s worth, is viewed as very popular today, even to the extent that it is a treasured quality. Some people carry with it a sense of pride and will not seek help from others when needed. It gives a sense of self-sufficiency. See 2 Cor. 3:5.

**Question 5.** Verse 3 tells us to think of ourselves “with sober [accurate] judgment.” In what areas do you need to work toward a more realistic self-appraisal? (Consider areas in which you might view yourself too highly as well as those in which you might sell yourself short.)

Answer:

**Question 6.** How does your view of yourself affect what you do and think? How does your view of yourself affect people around you? (Consider both positive and negative impact.)

Answer: It can affect your dependence on God or ignoring Him. We can be overly confident or have a greater dependence on God. For the second question other people can be drawn to us because of our self-confidence and having an “upbeat” demeanor. Others can be driven away if we have such a high self-esteem that it comes across as arrogance.

**Read Romans 12:9-16.**

**Question 7.** How is “love” acted out in this passage (verse 9)?

Answer: Love is to be genuine, not hypocritical or phony. Sometimes people can display acts of love that are through pretense or just being polite.

**Question 8.** How do these actions flow out of a proper view of ourselves as God’s children?

Answer: With a proper view of ourselves as God’s children, we should want to please Him and live according to His Word. **See Matt. 5:43-48; 7:12.**

**Question 9.** In what ways do these admonitions differ from the common views of relating to people in today’s world?

Answer: Today’s world carries a view of looking out for self, #1—self-satisfaction. These admonitions listed call for considering others.

**Question 10.** Read Romans 12:1 again. In view of the rest of this passage, what do you think it means to be a living sacrifice to God?

Answer: Sacrifice carries with it the idea of costing something or giving up something to offer—time, effort, money, pain or sweat equity. “Sacrifice of Praise,” praising when conditions are not ideal or the best. See 1 Chronicles 21:22-30. David wanted Ornan’s threshing floor and wanted to pay for it. It is easier to give that which does not hurt or cost us to give.

**Question 11.** Romans 12:2 invites us to be “transformed by the renewing of [our minds].” In light of this invitation, what would you like God to do so that you can function as a valuable part of the body of Christ?

### **Lifestyle Reflections**

How should we Christians view ourselves? Clearly (and this is the context in which Paul wrote in Romans 12), we are all essential parts of one body. We are needed not because we are more important than others but because we are just as important to them as they are to us. The Holy Spirit has a different set of values than we have and urges us to use fully those gifts God has given us to build up the body of Christ.

John Donne, an English preacher and writer wrote, “no man is an island entirely of itself. Every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main. If a clod be washed away by the sea, England is the less.”

It takes all of us to make the whole and every piece is important. No one is totally self-sufficient.

We need the Holy Spirit to open our eyes to our fellow believers and enable us to see them from God’s perspective. Only when this is true does this precious concept begin to warm our hearts and others in this perspective. What keeps me from marveling in our differences and in God’s varied grace?

Passages about gifts in the Bible: 1 Corinthians 12-14; Romans 12:4-8; Ephesians 4:7-16; 1 Peter 4:10-11.

**References:** Lifestyle Priorities Living with Purpose in a Fast-Paced World, Fisherman Bible Study Guides, WaterBrook Press; New American Study Bible; The Amplified Bible; The Opened Bible, KJV.