

The Focus of Divine Love

There is another reason, even more important, as to why I am of infinite value. This God, who planned my existence and brought it into being, loves me with a passionate love. This is the major theme of the Bible. It begins in the Garden of Eden when God goes searching for a disobedient and lost couple. It culminates on the cross of Calvary where the Son of God pours out his life for a rebellious and lost humanity.

The Bible takes the question of our sin and moral accountability to God seriously. He is a God of justice who will judge evil. But against this backdrop is the incredible love of God who was willing to come into this world in the person of his Son,* and take upon himself the full penalty for all our sins. **"God showed how much he loved us by having Christ die for us, even though we were sinful"** (Romans 5:8). He not only died, but rose again, demonstrating his victory over sin and death, and today reigns as Lord. When we accept Jesus Christ as our own personal Saviour and Lord, then we receive total forgiveness and reconciliation. The third person of the divine Trinity, the Holy Spirit, comes into our lives and brings us into an experience of this love from the greatest Lover in the universe. **"God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us"** (Romans 5:5). It is not something we can earn by good behaviour, but a gift freely given, to be received by faith.

Canon Michael Green, in *New Testament Spirituality*, says:

We are a delight to God. He desires us. He seeks our fellowship. Were it needed, he would die again for us. We never know ourselves to be truly loved until we know ourselves to be loved by God.

It is this loves that gives us true value. Anthony Hoekema is surely right, in his excellent little work *The Christian Looks at Himself*, that "the ultimate basis for our positive self-image must be God's acceptance of us in Christ." Theologian Helmut Thielicke says it well:

[Human] greatness rests solely on the fact that God in his incomprehensible goodness has bestowed his love upon [us]. God does not love us because we are so valuable; we are valuable because God loves us.

Someone has expressed it this way:

*If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it.
If God had a wallet, your photo would be in it.
He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning.
He could live anywhere in the universe and he chose your heart.*

This love does not require some kind of logical proof. It has been demonstrated once for all, for the world to see, through the cross of Christ and may be experienced through personal commitment to him. It is this that gives each human being infinite value. As Archbishop William Temple expressed it:

My worth is what I am worth to God, and that is a marvellous great deal, because Christ died for

me.

It is the infinite value of the price paid for your forgiveness that gives you infinite value as an individual. **"It was not with perishable things such as silver or gold that you were redeemed from the empty way of life...but with the precious blood of Christ, a lamb without blemish or defect...Through him you believe in God, who raised him from the dead and glorified him, and so your faith and hope are in God"** (1 Peter 1:18-21). And God does not make foolish investments!

Frederica Mathews-Green in *Christianity Today* tells the story of Deb, a lass who possessed low self-esteem. She had submitted to her boyfriend's demands for sex, concluding that "without him, I'm nothing." One demand led to another, and she gave in again when "he forced me to have an abortion." It seemed the best course—she was a teenager, had no high-school diploma, and her boyfriend was facing cocaine charges.

They eventually married, then went through a radical transformation after a faith conversion. "Self-esteem can't come from anywhere but Jesus," Deb says: "He will love you in spite of your failings. If your self-worth is based on your looks, your parents' love, the sense that you're great, it will fail. All that will pass."

As we grow in this faith, and begin to find out what the message of the New Testament is all about, so will our awareness grow of all that we have been given in Jesus. In *New Testament Spirituality*, Michael Green tells how years ago he came across an anonymous sheet of paper describing Jesus as "My Best Friend". It read as follows:

He initiated our friendship.

He loves me unconditionally.

He believes the best about me.

He is always available when I need him.

He desires the very best for me, knowing what that is, and leads me towards it, sometimes through difficult paths, but always supporting me and staying close to me.

He never gives up on me.

He brings out my spontaneity and enjoys me.

He allows me to be free to come and go, never forces, never controls, never manipulates.

He values me as a person and not merely for what I can do for him.

He opens up opportunities for me to know his other friends.

Joe Kent tells in *Decision* magazine how he battled for years with low self-esteem, due to much

ridicule he received in school. He says, "My self-esteem was shipwrecked long before I reached puberty." Now, despite being a Christian for eighteen years he still has a struggle. However, with his understanding of the gospel and encouragement of Christian friends, he is learning to cope with it. He writes:

I constantly tell myself that I am "deeply loved, fully pleasing, totally forgiven, accepted, and complete in Christ."...God is healing my wounds. I have learned that receiving God's approval is all that counts. The battle still rages, but God is right there in the midst of my struggle, carrying me through it. I believe that "with God all things are possible" [Cf. Mark 10:27]—and that includes healing my low self-esteem!

There are two fairytales that wonderfully capture these truths. The first is the tale Rapunzel, the story of a young girl imprisoned in a tower with an old witch. She is, indeed, very beautiful, but the witch constantly tells her she is ugly. It is the witch's strategy to keep the girl in the tower, imprisoned within herself. The moment of her freedom comes one day when she is gazing from the window of the tower. At the base of the tower stands her Prince Charming. She throws her hair, long and beautiful gold tresses, out the window and he braids the hair into a ladder and climbs up to rescue her. Rapunzel's imprisonment is really not of the tower, but the fear of her own ugliness which the witch described so often and so effectively. However, when Rapunzel sees in the mirroring eyes of her lover that she is beautiful, she is freed from the real tyranny of her imagined ugliness.

The second tale is the musical *Man of La Mancha*. It's a beautiful story about a medieval knight who meets a woman of the street, a prostitute. She's being confirmed in her life-style by all the people in her life.

But this poet-knight sees something else in her, something beautiful and lovely. He also sees her virtue, and he affirms it, over and over again. He gives her a new name—Dulcinea—a new name associated with a new character.

At first, she utterly denies it: her old scripts are overpowering. She writes him off as a wild-eyed fantasiser. But he is persistent. He makes continual deposits of unconditional love and gradually it penetrates her understanding of herself. It goes down into her true nature, her potential, and she starts to respond. Little by little, she begins to change her life-style. She believes it and she acts from her new character, to the initial dismay of everyone else in her life.

Later, when she begins to revert to her old character, he calls her to his deathbed and sings that beautiful song, "The Impossible Dream," looks her in the eyes, and whispers, "Never forget, you're Dulcinea."

When you respond to the love offered you in Christ and submit your life to him, a miracle takes place. You not only receive total forgiveness, but a new character by the presence of the Holy Spirit within you. The apostle Paul puts it like this, "**you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator**" (Colossians 3:9, 10). As you grow in the awareness of this transformation and the experience of his love, more and more old habits will drop off and you will begin to reflect your new character. Whatever else people may think of you or say about you, God now sees you as a beloved member of

his family and anticipates the beauty of all he intends to make you through the transforming work of his Spirit. His purpose is that we should be "**transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory**" (2 Corinthians 3:18). We may not know the end result, but God does. "**What we will be has not yet been seen. But we do know that when Christ returns, we will be like him, because we will see him as he truly is. This hope makes us keep ourselves holy, just as Christ is holy**" (1 John 3:2, 3**). It is knowing who I am in Christ that leads to a proper self-esteem.

*I have examined in some detail the Biblical evidence for the Trinity, and the full divinity of Jesus Christ, in the booklet [*Understanding the Trinity.*](#)

**I have explored further what it means to be a son or daughter of God in the booklet [*Who Am I? Finding My True Identity as a Human Being and as a Child of God.*](#)

