

Question: "How should a Christian view self-esteem?"

Answer: Many define self-esteem as “feelings of worth based on their skills, accomplishments, status, financial resources, or appearance.” This kind of self-esteem can lead a person to feel independent and prideful and to indulge in self-worship, which dulls our desire for God. [James 4:6](#) tells us that “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” If we only trust in our earthly resources, we will inevitably be left with a sense of worth based on pride. Jesus told us, “You also, when you have done everything you were told to do, should say, ‘We are unworthy servants; we have only done our duty’” ([Luke 17:10](#)).

This does not mean that Christians should have low self-esteem. It only means that our sense of being a good person should not depend on what we do, but rather on who we are in Christ. We need to humble ourselves before Him, and He will honor us. [Psalm 16:2](#) reminds us, “I said to the Lord, ‘You are my Lord; apart from you I have no good thing.’” Christians attain self-worth and esteem by having a right relationship with God. We can know we are valuable because of the high price God paid for us through the blood of His Son, Jesus Christ.

In one sense, low self-esteem is the opposite of pride. In another sense, low-self-esteem is a form of pride. Some people have low self-esteem because they want people to feel sorry for them, to pay attention to them, to comfort them. Low self-esteem can be a declaration of “look at me” just as much as pride. It simply takes a different route to get to the same destination, that is, self-absorption, self-obsession, and selfishness. Instead, we are to be selfless, to die to self, and to deflect any attention given to us to the great God who created and sustains us.

The Bible tells us that God gave us worth when He purchased us to be His own people ([Ephesians 1:14](#)). Because of this, only He is worthy of honor and praise. When we have healthy self-esteem, we will value ourselves enough to not become involved in sin that enslaves us. Instead, we should conduct ourselves with humility, thinking of others as better than ourselves ([Philippians 2:3](#)). [Romans 12:3](#) warns, “Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”

Why do Christians say human pride is sinful? I don't understand what's wrong with a little self-satisfaction and self-confidence. If I feel good about myself for serving at the local soup kitchen or helping a neighbor in need, does that mean I'm going to hell? Aren't we always telling our kids that it's important to have self-esteem?

To begin with, "self-esteem" is not the same thing as "pride" in the biblical sense. When a ministry like Focus on the Family talks about the importance of self-esteem, it's usually within the context of a discussion of the needs of *children and adolescents*. When a young person has been crushed and shattered by abuse, taunts, insults, or rejection, it's important to reassure him that he is valuable in the sight of God, not only as a human being made in the Creator's image, but as an individual for whom Christ died. This isn't a question of inflating anybody's ego. It's simply a matter of providing healing and restoration for those who need it most.

The Bible has something very different in mind when it says, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Proverbs 16:18). This might become clearer if we were to translate the word "pride" as "arrogance" or "haughtiness." That, after all, is exactly what it means in the scriptural context. When John describes the "world" as "the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the sinful pride of life" (1 John 2:16), he's not thinking of the warm feeling you get when you've done a good job at work or helped someone in need. Instead, he's warning you against the seductive notion that you don't need God. He's telling you to beware of the idea that you can get along very well on your own and can in fact become a god in your own right. This is the kind of pride that lies at the root of all human sin. The Tempter understood this when, in the Garden of Eden, he enticed Eve to eat the forbidden fruit by saying, "In the day you eat of it *you will be like God*, knowing good and evil" (Genesis 3:5).

The devil is the model of this principle. It was out of *pride* that he chose to exalt himself in defiance of the Almighty. In so doing, he violated his relationship with the King of Heaven. Mankind made the same bad choice. Man didn't do this because the devil *forced* him to. Instead, he freely chose, under the influence of temptation, to follow the devil's example.

On the other side of the coin, it's important to understand that biblical *humility* isn't about self-hatred or self-debasement. It would be more accurate to describe it as a kind of *self-forgetfulness*. It's a matter of knowing your place and embracing your role in the bigger scheme of things. It's about fulfilling God's purpose for your life with enthusiasm and zeal no matter how you feel. It's a question of putting other people's interests ahead of your own.