

Self-Esteem

Romans 12:3b

Sermon Transcript by Reverend Ernest O'Neill

What do you think of yourself? Would you say, "I think a lot about myself!"? I'd say, "No, I don't mean how often you think about yourself," and you would say, "No, I don't mean that either. I think a lot of myself and I think of myself a lot." I suppose too many of us might agree that that is true. Probably most of us would say the healthiest answer would be if you could say, "What do I think of myself? Well, I have never thought of myself as something to think about. I don't think of myself very much." Yet it is probably true that those of us who would give that answer don't live very differently from those of us who give the other answer. So some of us say, "I don't think very much about myself" and some of us would say, "I think of myself a lot and I think a lot of myself," but both sets live very much the same.

It is true, isn't it, that some of us are so imprisoned within the world of our own selfhood that our egocentricity has become almost an unconscious habit of mind. We don't actually think that we think a lot of ourselves, but our whole attitude to life is absolutely dominated by the fact that we are imprisoned within the world of our own selves.

So many of us interpret other people's looks and comments as meaning exactly the same as those looks and comments mean when we use them or express them. How many of us get into real difficulties by interpreting somebody's expression or comment as meaning in their hearts exactly what those comments would mean in our hearts? And of course they don't. Yet wouldn't you say that happens partly because of our incredibly subconscious egocentricity? We tend to think of everybody as just like us. Indeed we get annoyed that they aren't. So many of us can't understand how anybody could really enjoy baseball or anybody could enjoy classical music.

Actually, deep, deep down, many of us have a feeling, "They don't really know what it is to enjoy yourself and if they did know they certainly wouldn't have anything to do with classical music or baseball." It is amazing how very egocentric we are in our views of the world. One of the great problems is that some of us know that we think a lot of ourselves, and we think a lot of ourselves a lot of the time, and some of us think we don't think much of ourselves, but yet our whole attitude to life is imprisoned and bound and limited by our dreadful, dominating self-preoccupation.

Now we run up against two problems, whether we are consciously thinking of ourselves or unconsciously thinking of ourselves. We run up against two problems. Some of us think very little of ourselves; some of us are always down on ourselves. Some of us think, "I can't do anything right. I can't do my job right, I can't socialize right with other people, I can't dress right, I can't look right, I can't speak right, and I just don't seem to be able to do anything." We are always down on ourselves. We have what they call a poor self-image or very low self-esteem. We think we are miserable, hulking, clumsy--or shrunken, small--creatures who are just the clumsiest clods you ever saw. Yet, it is interesting, even those of us who think like that about ourselves can attest to the fact that there is still in us a streak of self-righteousness. Because when we can't get the screws screwed in or the button sewn on, we find that part of our irritability comes from the fact that we think we should be able to do it. Even in the midst of thinking that we are hopeless clods and we are inferior to everybody else, yet there runs through us this streak that makes us feel, "We should be able to do this. Why can't I get this button sewn on? Why can't I get this oil changed in the

car?" We still think we should be able to do it. There is a streak of self-righteousness in us.

Or, you notice it in another way. We attribute our inferiority to our moms or dads or our older brothers or our teachers. In other words, there is enough self-righteousness in us to say, "Well, I may be a miserable inferior creature, but I didn't make myself that." We trace it back and blame somebody else for it. It is interesting, loved ones, that even in the midst of our feelings of failure in ourselves, we still have these streaks inside us that suggest that we still feel we have something right inside.

Now the rest of us have a different problem. We don't have a problem with inferiority; we have a problem with healthy-mindedness. We have absorbed the whole modern attitude to self-esteem that is expressed in the title of the book that is used at all the sales courses--I'm OK, You're OK. But it is interesting here again, because just as our attitude of inferiority ends up constantly barking its shins on our own self-righteousness, so this attitude to ourselves--that we are alright--barks its shins on the facts of the case. In other words, it is very hard to go into prison and visit Charles Manson and say, "I'm OK and you're OK!" It is very hard to go into prison and say to Hinckley who shot President Reagan, "I'm OK and you're OK!" You can't say that unless you say that the occult is OK, unless you say that murder is OK, unless you say that immorality is OK.

Actually the words often stick in our own throats when we say "I'm OK," because knowing ourselves, it is like saying, "Impatience is OK and selfishness is OK and anger is OK." So it spoils the healthy-mindedness for us. Most of us have either one of those two problems. We have either a problem of a low self-esteem, which itself is not thorough, or we have a problem with this "I'm OK" high-self-esteem attitude which is not true and does not relate to the facts of the case.

What should we think of ourselves? It is what our Creator thinks of us. I'll show you, loved ones, what he thinks in this verse we are studying today. Romans 12:3: "For by the grace given to me I bid every one 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 which God has assigned him."

First, God says, "Don't think of yourself more highly than you ought to think." In other words, be as thorough going in your condemnation of self as God himself is. Be as thorough going about your low estimate of yourself as God is. Here is His view--"All of you have sinned and fallen short of my glory. [Romans 3:23] The wages of sin is death. [Romans 6:23] We know that our old selves was crucified with him, so that the sinful body might be destroyed and you might no longer be enslaved to sin. [Romans 6:6] Reckon yourselves to be dead indeed to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus." [Romans 6:11] God says, "I made you. You botched up the whole thing. I put you in my Son and remade you again. Accept that, and let's get going." He is very plain about it if you look at Romans 7:18: "For I know that nothing good dwells within me, that is in my flesh. I can will what is right, but I cannot do it." For I know that nothing good dwells within me--that is God's answer to I'm OK, You're OK. We need to get it straight in our minds what he means. It doesn't mean you have no good abilities. You have. I think many of you have great abilities--you can sing, you can talk, you can be good friends or you can do your job well. All of us have many good abilities. But God says, "Inside, you are a self-exalting, self-glorifying, parasitical monster that wants to be looked up to and respected and rule as God himself." You have so much self-righteousness that you are neither right with God nor right with men. Because of that, God took all of you and destroyed you forever on his Son's cross and remade you completely. That is what God wants us to think of ourselves. He wants us to see that inside us there is nothing but a parasitical, self-exalting, self-righteousness that has to be wiped out if there is going to be one God in the universe.

What do we do? We take Romans 7:18 which says, "For I know that nothing good dwells within me" and we say, "For I wrongly think that nothing good dwells within me. That's what we say. We say, "Well, you know it's a misconception on my part. I have a misconception here that nothing good dwells within me." In other words, "Poor little self! I wrongly think that you can't do anything right. Now I know, dear little self, that you can do something right. All those miserable people around here think you can't, but I know you can. If I tickle your chin or indulge you a little, I know you can do things right. If I indulge you enough or encourage you enough, or if that doesn't produce action, if I whack you or kick you or thump you or tell you off or criticize you, you will." We are so dumb.

The Creator of the universe says, -"You see that self of yours? It is hopeless. It is such a bad case that I had to destroy it and make it all over again. You know a television set is in bad shape when you send it to the repair man and all he does is throw it out into the garbage and tells you to buy a new one. That is what I did with you. That self of yours has no capacity to do real, pure, unselfish good. Accept My verdict on it and stop trying to torture that poor little self to death, trying to make it do something that it isn't capable of doing."

Loved ones, that is reality. Instead of trying to squeeze some good out of that little self by cajoling and threatening, by indulging it, beating it up, by exhorting and criticizing it, why not accept what God says? Your old self has nothing to do but pack the baggage up, throw it out and let the Holy Spirit nail it to the cross with Jesus. Then you cannot guess--"Feeling better, so much better, since I laid my burden down?--it is the world of difference. Instead of carrying that miserable self on your shoulders, instead of hoping for some good from it when God has plainly said it is good for nothing but to be burned and crucified on His Son's cross.

Instead of doing that, we keep trying to prove that it can do something, and that is where our frustration comes from. Be thorough going in your condemnation of self to Jesus' cross. That is what is so good about God. He doesn't condemn us, we condemn ourselves. We say, "You rotten self! You fool of a self! You should be able to do better than that!" He doesn't waste time with all that stupid condemnation stuff that only Satan indulges in. God condemns the self to the cross. He destroys it, he kills it. He doesn't waste time shaking his finger at it, making it feel bad. He destroys it and remakes it. He says to us, "Will you accept that? Will you accept that my dear Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, is able to show you what bits have to be destroyed and what bits can be resurrected? Will you let me do that? Will you stop trying to protect some of it yourself? There are some bits of it you like that are causing you all the trouble. Will you let me take all of it that I saw was necessary to destroy in my Son?"

First of all, God wants us not to think of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, because contrary to common opinion, that is what brings the unhappiness in our world. Our society is filled with those of us who have failure dreams, falling dreams and all kinds of feelings of inadequacy and incompetence. Our whole society is filled with little ones who feel that they can't do anything right. It is because they are expecting right from themselves instead of accepting that what God says is true--there is nothing right in themselves--and that is why he destroyed them and remade them in his Son.

Now there is another side, loved ones, that in a way is almost more important. Look at the second part of Romans 12:3: "For by the grace given to me I bid every one among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, [verse 3b] but to think with sober judgment, each according to

the measure of faith which God has assigned him." Conceit is insanity, but sanity is not thinking of yourself as lower than everybody else. God is not saying, "Thinking with sober judgment means thinking of yourself as lower than everybody else." No! That is not truth, for one thing. It is not thinking with sober judgment. It is as wrong to think of yourself as lower than everybody else as to think of yourself as better than anybody because of some natural ability like looks or wealth or position. Neither of those views is right. God says you have to think with sober judgment about yourself. In other words, you have to see that you as you were had nothing good in you at all, and that is why God took you, destroyed you in his Son and remade you.

But now that he has put you into his Son, you are not just a nobody. You are part of the Son of the Creator of the universe! Even if you are a nail on his little finger, you are part of the Son of the Creator of the universe. The Father has accepted you into his Son and you are not a nobody. You are part of his Son--the apple of his eye. He wants you to think of yourself now in that new position with sober judgment according as God has given to each a measure of faith. In other words, God puts you into his Son, he gives you a place in his Son and he gives you certain charismatic gifts to express that part of his Son. That's right.

God has put you into his Son and given you certain gifts to express that part of his Son. The weakness now is you say charismatic? You mean like Billy Graham and Oral Roberts and all those big guys? Charismatic like that?" No, look at the word that follows judgment in that verse: "...but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith which God has assigned him." "Each"--that is, each of us here. Forget Graham and all those big guys. Each of us has been assigned by God a place in his Son, and we are to think of ourselves in the light of that according to the measure of faith which God has assigned to each of us. Now maybe some of you are saying, "Oh, a measure of faith.

So He gives some of us a lot of saving faith and others of us not much saving faith." Or "He gives some of us a lot of working faith and others of us not so much working faith." Obviously God doesn't do that. In fact, the word "measure" is not the best translation of the word "metron." The better translation is "according to the portion of faith which God has assigned to each of us." We are to think of ourselves with sober judgment, each of us according to the portion of faith which God has assigned to each of us. In other words, God apportions to each of us a portion, a charismatic gift or an ability that belongs to faith. He gives that to each of us. He gives his gifts without repentance. That is what we are to think of ourselves. We are to think of ourselves as we are in eternity. Some of you have been given different gifts by God in order that his Son will be expressed fully in this world.

Loved ones, I plead with you to stop and think at this moment. That is where you go astray. It is! You have heard me up to the moment and you have followed the logic, but at this point you are in grave danger of saying what I said, "I have no particular gift!" I think you will laugh at this, but it will bring something home to you. About five years ago--I think we have been going in Campus Church for five years, and I had certainly been preaching on campus for eight years, and I had been in the ministry for twelve or fifteen years. One morning I wakened and thought, "Maybe God has given me a gift! People keep on saying I can preach and I really don't think I can, but maybe God has given me a gift of preaching."

Now you smile, but you are doing the same thing. As I am saying to you that God's Word says clearly that you have been given a portion or a charismatic gift or ministry to express Jesus in a way that only you can, you are sitting there and saying, "Well, yes, maybe." Here is the truth. Some of you

have the gift of making friends like Jesus. Some of you have the gift of listening to some wee soul who is in real trouble and making them realize that you really do understand. Some of you have a gift of baking and making things home-like and making people feel at home. Some of you have a gift of hospitality. Some of you have a gift of thinking clearly and expressing those thoughts to others. Some of you have a gift of being able to administer finances. Some of you have a gift of keeping things clean, and you like keeping things clean.

If you want to discover God's gift to you, it is often tied up with what you enjoy doing-- your interest. Some of you have a gift of working with your hands in wood or metal. Some of you have a gift of singing. Some of you have a gift of giving generously material things to other people. That is a gift--it is not just a matter of having the stuff. It doesn't actually matter what you have; it is a gift to be able to give material things generously in a way that builds a person up. Some of you have a gift of helping people laugh at things or be light about things. Some of you have a gift of coming into a room and brightening it with jokes. Some of you have a gift of comforting somebody who is in trouble. Some of you have a gift of just being able to feel what a shy person really feels like and understanding them. Some of you have a gift of praying for other people. Some of you have a gift for enjoying God's Word and imparting it to others. Loved ones, those are the eternal values that God has given to you. Those are what will continue even in heaven. That is part of Jesus that you have; that is a portion of faith that God has assigned you. You are to think of yourself with sober judgment because of that.

That was such a relief to me, that I saw God had actually given that gift to me without repentance and I was to treasure what he had given me, and I was to treasure his appreciation of me and to see myself as valuable because he saw me as invaluable. I was to enjoy expressing that gift and exercising it and I was to perfect it and use it on every possible occasion. In that way I would come into a right estimation of myself. It is nothing to do with whether you have nice hair or whether you look nice or whether you can talk well or whether you are wealthy or whether you are important. It is nothing to do with those purely incidental events that take place through the natural grace of God. Loved ones, you are to think of yourself as valuable not because of those stupid things that are passing and transient, but you are to carry on until you, like me, stumble across the gift that God has given you; and then when you stumble over it and realize, "Yes, I can do that!," then you are to thank God for it and do that thing with all your heart and be fulfilled in the doing of it.

Now what is your gift? Just watch it if you say you haven't one, because you have to fight this whole Book if you do. If you are like me, you just think of yourself as so ordinary and the things that you do as so ordinary that you don't think of them as particularly a gift at all. Actually, that is probably what you do when you have a gift and that is why it is a gift. You do it and it comes easy to you because it is a gift. So look out and see what God has given you; see what part of himself you express pretty naturally in yourself. Then begin to see that without your doing that, Jesus is crippled. When you do that, Jesus himself lives fully in your part of the world.

There is a myth that Jesus went back to heaven after the ascension, and he came to the gate of heaven and Gabriel met him there. Gabriel asked him how everything had gone in the commission that his Father had given him. Jesus explained to Gabriel what he had accomplished and Gabriel said, "And what arrangements have you made for continuing this now that you are back in heaven?" And Jesus outlined to him, "I have chosen twelve men and I have given them my abilities and I have given them my message and the truth that the Father gave to me." And Gabriel said, "What if they fail?" And Jesus answered, "I have made no other arrangements."

He has made no other arrangement for anybody but you to do what you alone can do. He has given you a part of himself that only you can express. I pray that you will get into what I at last got into--we are nothing, we are unimportant idiots except that God has given to each of us a part of his own Son Jesus' character that we can express. That is what makes us valuable, valuable beyond all the world. Each dear heart here, you are invaluable. You are dear to God.

Let us pray.

Dear Lord, we thank you for that. We thank you that as far as society and what the world can achieve, we are hopeless creatures. Thank you, Lord, that does not matter at all because it is all going to pass away in a few years and end up in dust. We do thank you Lord that each one of us here has a certain gift of expressing some of Jesus' character, love and ability. If we will do that with all our hearts, then we can appreciate as you appreciate how valuable we are.

Lord, we know we are invaluable to you anyway. But we thank you that we can think of ourselves in sober judgement when we see the particular part of Jesus you have given to us to express. We express it with all our hearts. Thank you, Lord.

Thank you, dear Lord Jesus, for giving us that. Thank you, Lord, there is no place for thinking of ourselves as worth nothing to anybody. We see that you have made no other arrangements, Lord Jesus. We see that without us, you are crippled and lame. We give ourselves to you anew this morning to do with all our hearts what you have given us the ability to do for your glory.

Now the grace of our Lord Jesus, the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us.
Amen.