

A BIBLICAL BASIS FOR SELF-WORTH - PETER SONDERGELD

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Abstract

Self-esteem has been, and continues to be, a critical concern for those in the helping professions, both in an academic context and also in a popular cultural context. There have been many proponents, and many critics of the concept of self-esteem and its remedy, self-love, for many years. The continued existence of the concepts of self-esteem and self-love, in both academic and popular thought, suggests that these concepts accurately describe a particular aspect of the human experience - that a common existential struggle for humanity is a low sense of personal value.

Within Christian thought and practice there are many different approaches to self-esteem, self-love and personal value. These approaches range from those who see no value in the self-esteem construct, and are opposed to any kind of self-love, to those who think self-esteem and self-love are essential and have made them central to an understanding of the core human condition. This article will challenge the adoption of the self-esteem construct as an explanation of the core human condition, and will argue that human value will not be derived from self-love, but from a return to our original created anthropology as worshippers and imagers of God.

We will begin with a short discussion of the problem of personal value and its remedy, and then move on to an analysis of humanity's original biblical anthropology (that humans were created in the image of God and are unceasing worshippers), and the effect that the corruption of this anthropology (idolatry of the heart) has had on personal value. We will conclude with a further discussion of self-love as a remedy for low personal value and see that it is not virtuous; in reality it is idolatry of the heart, leading to further idolatry, as created things are enlisted to shore up a lack of personal worth. The only remedy

for the restoration of personal value is for humanity to return to imaging and worshipping God.

The Problem of Personal Value and Its Remedy

The concepts of self-esteem and its remedy, self-love, have become part of both the cultural narrative, and many Christian's personal narratives. This article will argue that a biblical approach to personal value is more effective in understanding and rectifying a low sense of value than the concepts of self-esteem and self-love. It will demonstrate this by showing: where humanity originally derived value from; that a disordering of humanity's worship is the core human condition; that self-love is a counter-productive remedy for low personal value, and that reorienting to God reconnects humanity to the source of value.

Humanity has made many attempts to both define and rectify a lack of personal value; the most recent being the concept of self-esteem. Poor self-esteem is viewed by many in our culture as the ultimate thing that is wrong with humanity. The concept of self-esteem can be traced to the work of Alfred Adler¹ and finds expression in Cognitive Behavioural Therapy and much modern psychotherapeutic endeavour.² Though not actually using the term self-esteem, Alfred Adler developed the concept (that later became self-esteem) in his work on the inferiority complex. In his book *Understanding Human Nature*³ he explains how children who are born into the world with disabilities tend to become preoccupied with themselves and how others see them. He argues that some children are so affected by early feelings of helplessness, that they develop an inferiority complex,⁴ or a striving for significance which can lead to troublesome aggressive character traits⁵ and non-aggressive character traits.⁶ Over time, this view of the inferiority complex has transitioned into the modern understanding of self-esteem.⁷ The remedy for poor self-esteem in our culture has typically been some kind of variety of self-love.⁸

¹ V P Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1990).

² L R Overstreet, "Man in the Image of God: A Reappraisal," *Criswell Theological Review* 3, no. 1 (2005): 7.5.

³ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*: 66.

⁴ J H Sailhammer, *Genesis*, ed. F E Gaebelin, vol. 2, The Expositors Bible Commentary: Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1990). 269.

⁵ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*: 157.

⁶ Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis: Chapters 1-17*: 188.

⁷ Overstreet, "Man in the Image of God: A Reappraisal," 7.5.

⁸ G J Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, vol. 1, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Incorporated, 1998).

Divisions Within Christianity on Self-Esteem and Self-Love

Within Christian thought, there is a divide between those who strive to adopt the essence of the self-esteem concept, and those who feel that it has no place in Christian thought. Those who have worked to embrace the concept have had to grapple with the tension between the theological concept of sin, and the psychological correlation between positive self-regard and mental health.⁹ In his pivotal work *Self-Esteem: The New Reformation*, Schuller¹⁰ resolved this tension by defining sin as “any act or thought that robs myself or another human being of his or her self- esteem.” This definition of sin makes the *self* central, and self-esteem the greatest need of humanity.¹¹ Others, such as Fisher¹² are aware of the difficulty of importing the self-esteem construct into a theological context, but accept it as a presupposition, and then work to build their theology upon it; explaining how a Trinitarian foundation can serve to maintain self-esteem without questioning or establishing it.

There are others that dispute this approach to self-esteem and assert that it is a psychological concept that has no place in a biblical understanding of humans, nor does it find support in the scriptures. Jay Adams tends to be one of the more strident opponents of the concept of self-esteem. In the epilogue for his work *The Biblical View of Self-Esteem, Self-Love and Self-Image*, Adams¹³ calls upon his readers to do all they can to expose, resist and correct self-esteem teaching in the local church. In a similarly direct manner, Martin and Deidre Bobgan¹⁴ trace the roots of the self-esteem construct throughout the writings of James Dobson (arguably the most prolific influence in Christian Psychology in recent history) because, in their view, it compromises the preaching and hearing of the Gospel. Additionally, Myers,¹⁵ in his work *The Inflated Self*, argues that humanity’s thoughts of superiority are a much greater problem than thoughts of inferiority, and concludes that true humility consists of self-forgetfulness.

This is but a small survey of some of the proponents and opponents of the self-esteem construct, and reflects some of the disparity that exists within Christian thought regarding the handling of this concept of human value. Yet if we move from the term self-esteem to the

⁹ J M Frame, *Systematic Theology: An Introduction to Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2013). 116.

¹⁰ S J Grenz, "The Social God and the Relational Self: Toward a Theology of the Imago Dei in the Postmodern Context," *Horizons in Biblical Theology* 24, no. 1 (2002): 16.

¹¹ S J Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001). 227.

¹² D Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, trans. R H Fuller (London: SCM Press, 1959). 39-41.

¹³ S J Grenz, "Jesus as the Imago Dei: Image-of-God Christology and the Non-Linear Linearity of Theology," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 47, no. 4 (2004): 137.

¹⁴ H M Best, *Unceasing Worship: Biblical Perspectives on Worship and the Arts* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2003).

¹⁵ P D Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemers Hands* (NJ: P&R Publishing, 2002). 1229-30.

underlying concept of self-love, a whole new vista of biblical data and theological discussion opens up. Some argue that the seeds of the debate about the virtues of self-love were planted by God, through Moses, in Leviticus 19:18 where God commands the Israelites to “love your neighbour as yourself.” Jesus affirms this command (Mark 12:31) and also refers to a kind of self-love in other discourses in the gospels (Luke 6:31, Matthew 16:25). Whilst these references are by no means exhaustive, they demonstrate that there is a kind of self-love that Jesus neither maligns nor encourages, that does not appear to be inherently evil in itself.

The nature of self-love has been the source of many debates in Christian thought, and has generated a corresponding number of incompatible claims, which range from those who despise it to those who embrace it.¹⁶ John Calvin¹⁷ asserts that self-love is undesirable and is a “noxious pest” which, rather than enhancing the love of neighbour, actually threatens it. Nygren¹⁸ despairs of the possibility that humanity can love at all without the corrupting influence of self-love; in doing so he reveals his assertion that any pursuit of the self’s good is inherently sinful (though if self-love were this sinful, one might expect Jesus to have given some disclaimers in the scripture references cited above). In contrast, St. Augustine makes assertions about self-love that are very difficult to harmonise.¹⁹ He writes that “the primal destruction of man was self-love”, that those who do not love God do not love themselves, and that one must search for the right kind of self-love. Aquinas²⁰ moves further toward self-love by asserting that our love for God will be followed by a love for neighbour and a love for what belongs to God; this includes people and their bodies. And, finally, Edwards²¹ asserts that there are valid expressions of self-love, and draws distinctions between self-love that is natural, social, sinful and sanctified. He would have found no place for “a concept of self-esteem based on inherent human worth” and, in its place, asserted that “it is only in relationship to others, especially God, that the self finds its proper definition and worth.” At this point it may be wise to heed the warnings of Augustine and Calvin, and proceed carefully with due regard to the risks associated with the concept of self-love.

Whilst an extensive examination and discussion of the background and implications of the various theories of self-love is beyond the scope of this article, we shall return to a limited

¹⁶ I H Marshall, "New Bible Dictionary," (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1996), 2.

¹⁷ J D Douglas and M C Tenny, "The New International Dictionary of the Bible," ed. J D Douglas and M C Tenny (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1987), 451.

¹⁸ F W Danker, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), 50.

¹⁹ G Kittel, G Friedrich, and G W Bromiley, *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: W B Eerdmans, 1985), 1.

²⁰ W L Moran, "Ancient Near Eastern Background of the Love of God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 25, no. 1 (1963): 294-95.

²¹ L Stadelmann, *Love and Politics: A New Commentary on the Song of Songs* (New York, NJ: Paulist, 1992), 92-100.

discussion of self-love after we have considered humanity's anthropological starting point and the core human condition. These discussions will help to identify the pre-fall source of human value, and humanity's post-fall tendency to erode it; having done that, we will be in a place where we can determine if self-love is a useful remedy for a lack of human value.

Humans Were Created to Derive Value from God

God designed and created humanity to derive value directly from Himself. When God created the world (Psalm 115:3, Jeremiah 32:27) He freely decided what to create, how to create it, what its purpose would be, and, as a result, owns it (Psalm 24:1-2, Psalm 89:11). These rights are hard-wired into created things, and, though a creation may desire to be completely disconnected from God, it is impossible. In Psalm 50:12 God corrects His people who had begun to think that *He* needed them; "If I were hungry, I would not tell you, for the world and its fullness are mine." They didn't own animals that He required of them by way of sacrifice; He owned everything, including them, and wanted their thanksgiving and their remembrance of Him.

When God created humanity (in the persons of Adam and Eve) He chose to distinguish them from the rest of creation by creating them in His image (Genesis 1:26-27), thus 'hardwiring' them (and by extension - us) to Himself. This reality has major ramifications for human identity and value. Middleton, in his work *The Liberating Image*,²² highlights the centrality of this notion in his preface, where he states that the impetus for his research into this area was his own personal struggle with identity and self-image. This is of no surprise. The doctrine of the image of God makes, arguably, the greatest contribution to the dignity and worth of humanity, because of the way that it elevates every human to a status that is just short of divine.²³

As we look deeper into the essence of what it means to be created in the image of God, we are struck by a lack of specificity in the Old Testament writings. The phrase "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness" occurs only once in the first chapter of Genesis, and the basic phrase "the image of God" only four times in the Old Testament.²⁴ In the light of this

²² J E Lapsley, "Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 65, no. 3 (2003): 9-10.

²³ J M Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1986). 53.

²⁴ J Piper, *The Pleasures of God* (Great Britain: Christian Focus Publications, 1998). 132-34.

scant biblical evidence, Hamilton concludes that Genesis 1:26 does not appear to be interested in defining the image of God in man.²⁵

Whilst the biblical commentary regarding the image of God is scant, there is an inversely proportional amount of extra-biblical commentary on this particular notion. In the absence of significant biblical definition, the historical interpretation of the doctrine of the image of God tends to be driven more by contemporary philosophical and religious thought²⁶ than by objective exegesis. A number of scholars²⁷ have summarised the views of the image of God throughout history. This brief summary by Overstreet²⁸ highlights the effect that the philosophical and religious thought of the day had on the interpretation of this concept: Philo declares that the mind is the image of God in man; Tertullian advocates that physical likeness and eternity, though lost at the fall, are the image of God in man; Augustine and Aquinas, that rationality is the image of God in man.

When one focusses on the immediate scriptural, cultural, and Biblical Theological context, there are four aspects of the image of God that make a valuable contribution to our understanding of the image of God. They are: that the image of God indicates our familial connection with God, that the image of God involves dominion, that the image of God involves relationality, and that the image of God *is* Jesus Christ.

Being made in the image of God speaks of humanity's familial connection with God. In Genesis 5, a list of descendants from Adam to Noah is recorded. In Genesis 5:1 God creates man in His likeness, male and female, and calls them man. In Genesis 5:3, in a similar fashion to God, Adam fathers a son in his likeness, and names him Seth. The purpose of this genealogy, and the inclusion of image and likeness terminology, is to demonstrate that God is the father of all, and humanity is part of His family.²⁹ Wenham³⁰ suggests that Seth, being fathered in Adam's likeness and image, signifies that the image of God was not lost in the fall, but was passed on from Adam to Seth. Whilst this assertion enjoys biblical support (Genesis 9:6), it does not appear to be the main concern of Genesis 5:3; image and likeness in this context appears to be more concerned with showing how humanity is God's offspring (Acts 17:28).

²⁵ Piper, *The Pleasures of God*: 137.

²⁶ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*: 54.

²⁷ Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*; Lapsley, "Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy."; T George, "Theology of the Reformers," Broadman and Holman Publishing Group; G K Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2008).

²⁸ George, "Theology of the Reformers" 44-66.

²⁹ C P Christ and J Plaskow, eds., *Womanspirit Rising* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1992), 70.

³⁰ M Luther, *The Larger Catechism of Martin Luther* (Radford, VA: A & D Publishing, 2008). 127.

Being made in the image of God speaks of humanity's dominion. The Hebrew word for image (*selem*) is also the same word that is translated *idol*, and implies "a localised, visible, corporeal representation of the divine."³¹ God has created humanity in his likeness and image, to be His representative on earth. As God exercised His dominion in the work of creation, so humanity's first command is to exercise a similar dominion in the created world, as His representatives. Clines³² challenges this view when he asserts that dominion does not define the image of God but is an essential expression of the image of God. So we may say that God has created humanity, as part of His family; not to worship images of false deities, but to be the localised image of the true God for the whole world.³³

Being made in the image of God speaks of humanity's relationality. If it is true that God's making humanity in His image speaks of a familial connection, then it naturally follows that part of this being made in His image will necessarily involve relationality, because that is what occurs in families; in fact, that is what a family is – people related one to another. Yet, again, the immediate context provides more help for us in this respect. In Genesis 1:27 it says that God created man in His own image, both male and female. The reality that Adam and Eve were created sexually different leads very naturally to the conclusion that they were relational creatures.³⁴ Grenz³⁵ asserts that humanity's differentiation in sexuality helps us understand the image of God concept, because it demonstrates a wholeness found in relationship that was lacking in Adam as an individual. Adam and Eve were to find the completion of their identity in connection with another (a common reality for Hebrews – Ruth 2:5). This wholeness found in relationship between Adam and Eve led to the creation of the community of the world.³⁶

Finally, being made in the image of God points us to Jesus who *is* the image of God. Bonhoeffer³⁷ argues that the image of God was lost in Adam and Eve and that humanity has consequently been striving to regain the image of God by their own unsuccessful efforts; this, he says, is the reason that *the* image of God, Jesus, needed to come to earth. Whilst Bonhoeffer asserts that Jesus is the image of God, he fails to develop a substantial underlying

³¹ Lapsley, "Feeling Our Way: Love for God in Deuteronomy," 25.

³² Boice, *Foundations of the Christian Faith*: 97.

³³ Oxford University Press, "Oxford Dictionaries: Language Matters," Oxford University Press, <http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/sanity>
<http://www.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/english/insanity>.

³⁴ D Powlison, *Dynamics of Biblical Change Workbook* (Philadelphia, PA: Christian Counselling and Education Foundation, 2006). 50.

³⁵ Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*: 278.

³⁶ Powlison, *Dynamics of Biblical Change Workbook*: 51.

³⁷ D P Scaer, "Man Made in the Image of God and Its Relationship to the First Promise," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 41, no. 3 (1977): 270-71.

theology from which to fully substantiate his assertion. In contrast, Grenz³⁸ provides a thoroughgoing analysis of the intersection of image of God anthropology, and Christology. Unlike those who argue that the writer of Genesis assumes their readers would have understood what the image of God was,³⁹ Grenz⁴⁰ asserts that the lack of clarity regarding the concept is owing to the future fulfilment of the full meaning of the image of God in the man Jesus Christ. Grenz argues that the New Testament leads us in this direction. Two significant references are Paul's discourse in Colossians 1:15-20, where he clearly states that Jesus is the image of the invisible God, and the opening verses of Hebrews 1:1-4, where Jesus is referred to as the exact imprint of God's nature. That Jesus is the image of God helps us to locate humanity's anthropological trajectory and the locus of their value – that we would be remade in the image of Christ (Colossians 3:10).

When God created humanity in His image they were His children, acting as His representatives on the earth, for the purpose of exercising dominion over creation, with the ultimate objective of being like Christ – the image of God in man. These four aspects of the image of God in man speak of a richness and depth of value that God originally built into humanity. Their value came from belonging to God's family, from being rulers of the world as part of God's family, from being oriented to God relationally, and from being made in His likeness.

Worship is an Extrospective Loving and Valuing of God

In contrast to the introspective posture of self-love and self-esteem, God originally created humanity with an extrospective bent – He made humans to worship unceasingly; to find, love, and worship someone of infinite value outside of themselves.

God has created His family in such a way that He would be the benevolent father who outpours His character and goodness toward His children and His children would orient to Him, and be His representatives, by responding to Him in worship. God is eternal and infinite. When He gives love, He is not left with less than He had before He gave it and, though He keeps mercy for thousands (Exodus 34:7), there is no risk that He will ever run out of it (Psalm 147:5). He continuously outpours His character toward His triune self and His

³⁸ Beale, *We Become What We Worship: A Biblical Theology of Idolatry*; E T Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave* (NJ: P & R Publishing, 2001).

³⁹ Press, "Oxford Dictionaries: Language Matters" 785.

⁴⁰ Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*: 622.

creation.⁴¹ In a similar, though different sense, humanity was created to continuously respond to His goodness and fullness in unceasing worship. Worship, asserts Tripp,⁴² “is not just something we do; it defines who we are.” But what is worship and how is it tied to who we are?

A greater understanding of the concept of worship will be necessary if we're to understand, more fully, the nature of worshippers. A number of scholars,⁴³ when discussing the nature of the word worship in the source documents, begin with the old English definition of the word. The English word for worship means *worth-ship* and “denotes the worthiness of the individual receiving the special honour due to his worth.”⁴⁴ God’s worth, expressed in His creation of the world, is significant in the way it inspires the worship of Him by His creatures (Psalm 95:6).

But we can derive more help in understanding the nature of worship if we look closely at the original languages from which we draw the translation ‘worship’. The most prominent words translated as worship (or a derivative thereof) in the English text are *shâchâh* in Hebrew and *prōskunēō* in Greek. The word *shâchâh* has to do with taking a bowing stance as an expression of submission before a superior and the word *prōskunēō* is “to express in attitude or gesture one’s complete dependence on or submission to a high authority figure.” It is also expressed through bowing down, prostrating oneself,⁴⁵ and serving.⁴⁶ Both of these words communicate the idea that worship is about honouring the worth of someone else. In addition to these are two other words which are associated with worship: ‘*âbad* in Hebrew and *latrēuō* in Greek. The word ‘*âbad* is a highly generic term which involves working and serving whilst *latrēuō* entails a bodily serving and the carrying out of religious duties, especially in a cultic context.⁴⁷ Yet despite these helpful distinctions, there are limitations to deriving a definition of worship from the original languages, because sometimes the original word is interpreted as worship, and other times it is not.⁴⁸ One example is in Matthew 2:2,8 where the same Greek word (*prōskunēō*) is used to describe two different actions; one of which appears to be worship (the wise men from the east) and the other, homage (Herod). Carson⁴⁹

⁴¹ E F Harrison, *Romans*, ed. F E Gaebelein, The Expositors Bible Commentary: Romans Through Galatians (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1976). 22.

⁴² J D G Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Incorporated, 1998). 44.

⁴³ C S Lewis, *The Joyful Christian: 127 Readings* (NY: Macmillan Publishing Company, 1977); B Meehan, *Beyond the Yellow Brick Road* (Chicago, IL: Contemporary Books, 1984); T Keller, *Counterfeit Gods* (Great Britain: Hodder and Stoughton, 2009).

⁴⁴ Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*: 1070.

⁴⁵ J Forrey, "The Concept of 'Glory' as it Relates to the Christian's Self-Image," *The Journal of Pastoral Practice* 10, no. 4 (1992): 882.

⁴⁶ M Bahr and T K Martin, "And Thy Neighbour as Thyself: Self-Esteem and Faith in People as Correlates of Religiosity and Family Solidarity," *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 22, no. 2 (1983): 948.

⁴⁷ Forrey, "The Concept of 'Glory' as it Relates to the Christian's Self-Image," 587.

⁴⁸ Lewis, *The Joyful Christian: 127 Readings*: 19.

⁴⁹ Lewis, *The Joyful Christian: 127 Readings*: 26.

maintains that “the harder you press to unpack . . . worship, the more difficult the task” and concludes that “worship embraces relationship, attitude, act, life.”

We can see from this brief word study, that the worship of God includes the service, and the honouring, of Him above all else, since there is no one and nothing like Him (Jeremiah 10:6). It has to do with “adoration, thanksgiving, prayers of all kinds, the offering of sacrifice and the making of vows.”⁵⁰ In Psalm 29:1-2 the Psalmist calls upon the people to worship the Lord: “Ascribe to the LORD, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the LORD glory and strength. Ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name; worship the LORD in the splendour of holiness.” The worship due to God ought to be in proportion to His greatness – which is unsearchable (Psalm 145:3).

Yet the kind of worship that is commensurate with God’s greatness will never be enough if it is merely an external expression. It must encompass all of one’s life. Many times throughout the scriptures God rebukes His people for an outward expression of worship that is merely a thin veneer over an unfaithful heart (Amos 5:21-24, Isaiah 1). Jesus also criticises an external approach to worship that lacks a corresponding heart of the worshipper. “This people honours me with their lips, but their heart is far from me” . This type of worship is more akin to the homage Herod desired to give, rather than the worship the wise men gave (Matthew 2:2,8).

This notion that worship is something that must be embodied in the life of the worshipper can be seen in Deuteronomy 6:5 , where the people of Israel are commanded to “love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your might.” Yet some⁵¹ have argued that this command to love is a covenantal love that is defined primarily by adherence to the law, and not by parental or conjugal love . Moran, in a classic article on the love of God in Deuteronomy, asserts that the love commanded by God is “a love which must be expressed in loyalty, in service, and in unqualified obedience to the demands of the law.” It is a love devoid of significant affection for God, and is expressed in a political and behavioural way. In contrast, Cross and Perdue assert that the family “is a more appropriate background than politics for understanding the covenantal language to which love is so tightly bound in Deuteronomy.” This concurs with the notion that one aspect of the image of God is familial.

Biblically speaking, the heart comprises the mind (Deuteronomy 7:17), the will (1 Samuel 2:35) and the emotions (1 Samuel 1:8) . It would be very difficult for one to have a loyal love

⁵⁰ Meehan, *Beyond the Yellow Brick Road*.

⁵¹ J Makujina, "The Second Greatest Commandment and Self-Esteem," *Masters Seminary Journal* 8, no. 2 (1997): 78; R T France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary* (Nottingham, England: Intervarsity Press, 1985).

that encompasses the whole of the heart, without the engagement of the affections (given that affections also come from the heart). In contrast to a non-affective view of loyalty as argued by Moran, Lapsley⁵² asserts that “loyalty can, and often does, have a very strong affective quality.” She cites Hittite parity treaties as evidence that contemporary treaties intended “to create an affective relationship as well as a legal bond.” Further discussion of the place of the affect in loving God would be very useful, but is beyond the scope of this article.

In summary, it would not be possible for an Old Testament Israelite to fulfil God’s law without love for Him, because the duty within the law is bound up, not in the stipulations, but in the relationship.⁵³ Whilst humanity tends towards the observance of external behaviour (because we are unable to see the affections of the heart in other people) God prefers to focus on the internal motivation of the heart (1 Samuel 16:7, Matthew 5:21-30), and calls all people to love Him with their whole selves; it is this kind of love of God, that precedes the love of our neighbour, that fulfils the law (Mark 12:30-31). In saying this, Jesus makes explicitly clear that love for God is the only possible motivation behind the satisfactory fulfilment of the law.

The two concepts of worship and love are interconnected. If the command of God is to love Him with all of our heart, that will mean humanity orienting themselves towards Him as the most valuable being in the universe, and this will result in the worship of Him. This call to value the most valuable most highly is an essential component of true righteousness⁵⁴ and worship. It is not possible for a human to worship God, and at the same time love something else more than Him, because what they love both nullifies the worship they profess, and reveals the worship they are engaged in – the object of their affection. What humanity values, they love, and what humanity loves, they worship. We can extrapolate this principle into practical realities and conclude that when humanity hopes (Psalm 71:1-3,5), trusts (Psalm 22:4-5,71:5-6), pursues (2 Chronicles 20:3), speaks (Psalm 71:8), serves, loves and obeys, they are worshipping – because each of these reveal what the heart loves.

Personal human value does not appear to have been problematic prior to the fall of humanity. Adam and Eve’s identity and value were intact. The connection between them and God was unbroken, they were oriented towards Him and lived all of their life *Coram deo* - life lived before the presence of God.⁵⁵ Yet in the fall, humanity turns away from living *Coram Deo*,

⁵² J Piper, "Love Your Neighbour as Yourself, Part 2," <http://www.desiringgod.org/sermons/love-your-neighbor-as-yourself-part-2>.

⁵³ J Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1997). 222.

⁵⁴ A H Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being* (Floyd, VA: Sublime Books, 2014). 39.

⁵⁵ E L Johnson, "Self-Esteem in the Presence of God," *Journal of Psychology and Theology* 17, no. 3 (1989): 397.

and we begin to see some critical breaches in the links between God and humanity - through which value was derived. It is in a further understanding of the nature of the corruption of our created anthropology that we will be able to more accurately track the mechanisms that are caustic to personal value.

Low Self-Esteem is not the Core Human Issue

Low self-esteem has traditionally been one explanation for what is wrong with people - yet there is much debate and commentary regarding the human condition in general, both within and without Christianity. One significant contribution to this discussion was Valerie Saiving,⁵⁶ who wrote a pivotal article questioning the reliability of theological definitions of the human condition, given that the overwhelming majority of theologians contributing to this doctrine are male. Whilst her concern may be valid, and is worthy of closer evaluation, her definition of sin at the beginning of the article limits the generalisability of her subsequent comments. Saiving defines sin as the self's attempt to overcome the anxiety associated with individual loneliness and the survival of the self, by the magnification of the individual's power, righteousness, or knowledge. Whilst many of these aspects of Saiving's definition can be observed in the fallen world, it is difficult to see how anxiety, and being driven by loneliness and the survival of the self, would have been a major factor in the fall of humanity (given that Adam and Eve existed in a perfect state).

In Genesis 3, Adam and Eve, for the first time, turned their worship toward another god, namely themselves, and the result was that their unceasing worship became disordered and distorted. The rest of humanity has both inherited (Romans 5:12), and subsequently added to, this disorder. This can be seen explicitly in Romans 1:25 where Paul writes that humans have "exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator." There are only two possible objects of human worship - the creator or created things, and human history bears witness to this reality. People exchange created gods for that which is not God. Jeremiah rebuked Israel for this when he wrote, "Has a nation changed its gods, even though they are no gods? But my people have changed their glory for that which does not profit." The first command in Exodus 20 is pivotal in all obedience because of the connection between worship and obedience: "You shall have no other gods before me." Luther⁵⁷ saw this connection and wrote that "where the heart is rightly disposed

⁵⁶ C S Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (Great Britan: Collins Fontana Books, 1968). 31-32.

⁵⁷ P C Craigie, *Jeremiah 1-25* (Dallas, TX: Word Incorporated, 1998). 17.

toward God and this commandment is observed, all the others follow.” The core human condition is not just ‘sin’. Sin is the result of an affair with a false God.

A disordered life is the result of disordered worship. In the fall, we find humanity turning its back on the worship of God, and the subsequent turning toward other gods. This turning away from life lived *Coram Deo* resulted in the disorder of sin (Genesis 3:14-19). Humans are worshippers, and when God is the object of their unceasing worship their lives are ordered and sane – they are able to think and behave in a rational manner, yet when their worship is turned towards false gods, they become insane and act in irrational and foolish ways. The writer of *Ecclesiastes* makes this connection between evil and insanity when he writes that “the hearts of the children of man are full of evil, and madness is in their hearts while they live.” Humanity experientially lives out the reality that “wickedness and folly are madness.”⁵⁸ Humanity loves “the darkness rather than the light”, they love things that deceive them (Romans 1:25) and wage war against their souls (1 Peter 2:11), and they end up imaging (1 John 3:8) God’s arch enemy, Satan. Yet when they turn their worship back to God, they turn to the one who “makes madmen sane.”⁵⁹

Thus the core human condition is that people direct their unceasing worship towards created things rather than the creator God; as a consequence, they become idolaters. Whether it is the physical idols of the east, or an invisible god, such as fear of other people (Luke 12:4-7), all idolatry begins as an internal, idolatrous love of the heart, before it manifests itself externally. Ordinary desires and created things become idolatrous when people love, serve, fear, hope in and sacrifice for them. This is the very thing that God spoke to Ezekiel about regarding the elders who came to Him for a word from the Lord: “Son of man, these men have taken their idols into their hearts, and set the stumbling block of their iniquity before their faces.” Second by second, human hearts are trusting and worshipping something. The question is, is it the creation or the creator? In the next section of this article we will look in more depth at the way that the idols that we worship are co-opted into our service to help us feel better about ourselves, and to restore personal value lost at the fall.

⁵⁸ R Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word Incorporated, 1998). 91.

⁵⁹ D Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counselling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R Publishing, 2003). 10.

Idols of the Heart Devalue Their Worshipers

In addition to all of the deleterious effects of false worship that have been mentioned so far, the worship of idols, and the sin associated with it, has a particularly caustic effect on the worshippers. The psalmist, in Psalm 115:4-8, highlights how idol-makers and subsequent worshippers, take on the muteness, deafness and blindness inherent in the idols they worship. When people worship God they image Him and become more like Him; they become more alive and a truer representation of what God originally intended them to be. But when they turn from Him, they image and reflect the object of their worship . What they revere, they “resemble, either for ruin or restoration”; in other words, people become what they worship.⁶⁰

This final summary of idol worshippers is a solemn warning that those who do so, lose their value – they end up being less than human, and of far less significance than they were originally created to be. Their loss of value is directly connected to their turning away from God, and hence worshipping and imaging other things. This is akin to the objects a mirror reflects. “A mirror does not have its value in itself, but in what it reflects. The statue has its worth because of the person it represents. Man therefore has his worth, not because of himself, but because he is some way reflects God.”⁶¹ When a mobile phone becomes the object of my worship, then there is an immediate limit placed upon the amount of value that I can have. I can never have more value than the phone itself; that is impossible. A reflection in a mirror is inextricably linked to the image that it reflects. If God has created us as a worshipping ‘imager’, then when we turn from worshipping and imaging the infinitely valuable, we will reflect and image a comparatively worthless, created thing. We, by nature, are of much greater value when we are oriented to, and reflecting, God himself, than when we image and reflect false gods.

Humanity appears to be bent on the pursuit of things that rob it of value. Isaiah speaks to this when he says “All who fashion idols are nothing, and the things they delight in do not profit.” From the fall, humanity has been working to cast off restraint, to be free from God and the source of value. God speaks to this reality through Jeremiah when He asks His people “What wrong did your fathers find in me that they went far from me, and went after worthlessness, and became worthless?” This worship of created things instead of the creator is cosmically shocking (Jeremiah 2:11-13) and this changing of gods is something quite unlike the ways of idol worshippers.

⁶⁰ Powlison, *Seeing with New Eyes: Counselling and the Human Condition Through the Lens of Scripture*: 11-12.

⁶¹ Scaer, “Man Made in the Image of God and Its Relationship to the First Promise,” 2.

Another facet of idolatry of the heart, is that humans lose the God-given dominion that was part of their being made in His image – they become slaves to whatever they worship. Humans were originally designed to worship the Creator and have dominion over the creation (Genesis 1:26) but when worship becomes perverted, dominion gets inverted. When humanity worships and serves the creature rather than the creator (Romans 1:25), creation has dominion over them. They are no longer in control, but are being mastered and controlled by their (created) chosen god.⁶² This loss of dominion finds its expression in the service of the false god. Since worship involves service, it follows that the worshipper of false gods will, in some way, be subservient and submissive to the object of their worship. Bowing down and serving idols is expressly forbidden in the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-6). Interestingly, some translations of the Bible (NRSV, NLT, GNB) utilise the word *worship* in verse 5, instead of *serve*, again highlighting the greater honour and worth attributed to the one that is being served. This sense of choosing one's god and the corresponding service can be seen in Psalm 106:28, where Israel is said to have “yoked themselves to the Baal of Peor” (a similar thought is also echoed in Numbers 29:3 and Hosea 9:10).

Whilst a worshipper chooses their god initially, it is not long before the god begins choosing them. We can identify some of the components in this transition via a closer look at Romans 1 and some related scriptures. In Romans 1:25, Paul informs us that one of the components of the shift towards the worship of the creation is an iniquitous exchange - humanity “exchanged the truth about God for a lie.” Yet this was not just ‘a lie,’ but ‘the lie’ - “that something or someone is to be venerated in place of the true God”. This exchange was both precipitated by distortion (futile thinking and darkened, foolish hearts in Romans 1:21) and caused distortion. Dunn⁶³ asserts that the lie of idolatry is “a falsification of reality which distorts all man's perception and consequent attitudes and conduct.” This deception, by its very nature, is a repeating trap, and is at the heart of the deceitfulness of sin (Obadiah 3, Romans 7:11, Ephesians 4:22, Hebrews 3:13). This is also taught by Isaiah at the conclusion of his satirical discourse on idol worshippers: “He feeds on ashes; a deluded heart has led him astray, and he cannot deliver himself or say, ‘Is there not a lie in my right hand?’” The lie of idol worship promises freedom, but only delivers bondage, leading to more bondage. Lewis⁶⁴ asserts that this very same mechanism will be at work in eternity, as those in hell “enjoy the horrible freedom they have demanded, and are therefore self-enslaved.”

⁶² Welch, *Addictions: A Banquet in the Grave*: 50.

⁶³ Dunn, *Romans 1-8*: 63.

⁶⁴ Lewis, *The Joyful Christian: 127 Readings*: 226.

This dominion-inversion can be seen prevalently in the modern day use of the term “addiction.” The term addiction is used quite widely in our culture. People are said to be addicted to alcohol, drugs, pornography, mobile phones and technology, when the biblical truth is that they have worshipped these things and have become slaves to their god. For the drug addict, “Dope is God. It is the Supreme Being, the higher power, in the junkie’s life. He is subjugated to its will. He follows its commandments. The drug is the definition of happiness, and gives the meaning of love. Each shot of junk in his veins is a shot of divine love, and it makes the addict feel resplendent with the grace of God.”⁶⁵ This is a dramatic shift from the way popular culture views addiction. Culturally, addicts are seen as victims (which in some sense they are) but, seen through biblical glasses, addicts are actually willing slaves. Keller⁶⁶ asserts this when he writes, “What many people call “psychological problems” are simple issues of idolatry. Perfectionism, workaholism, chronic indecisiveness, the need to control the lives of others – all these stem from making good things into idols that then drive us into the ground as we try to appease them. Idols dominate our lives.”

In summary, false gods are despotic rulers over the people who worship them. Humanity’s turning of their worship towards idols is a turning away from God, a rejection of God’s authority as father, a corruption of the image of God within humanity, and an inversion of our original, created dominion. Idolatry of the heart strikes right at the fulcrum of human value. This leads us back to a further discussion of self-love and raises the question: Is humanity able to independently rectify the effects that idolatry has on personal value, by loving and valuing themselves?

Is Self-Love a Virtue?

In their perfect created state, Adam and Eve were valuable because they were created in the image of God and were oriented towards Him in a continuous posture of worship. When they sinned, both the image of God in them, and their worshipful posture, were defiled and deformed. They became self-referential. In that moment they worshipped themselves and became self-idolaters. In doing so they lost their glorious covering, and became clothed with guilt and shame.⁶⁷ They were not good enough anymore, and they knew it. In their worship of

⁶⁵ Meehan, *Beyond the Yellow Brick Road*: 175.

⁶⁶ Keller, *Counterfeit Gods*: xxii.

⁶⁷ Forrey, "The Concept of 'Glory' as it Relates to the Christian's Self-Image," 34.

themselves they had become less than human (Daniel 4:30-33). This was the beginning of humanity's drive to autonomously establish identity and value.

It is in the light of this pattern that Adam and Eve set in motion, which humanity in general finds itself in, that it is an appropriate time to pause and reconsider the notion of self-love. Is there a virtuous, God-approving, self-love that can rectify this loss of value which resulted from false worship? This is a particularly difficult question, because self-love has been argued by many as a corrupting influence in the scriptures and, in contrast, those scriptural references that appear to support the notion of self-love, tend to assume its presence, rather than command its pursuit. One of the most common verses used to justify self-love is Leviticus 19:18 (or Matthew 22:39 as quoted by Jesus) which instructs us to love others as we love ourselves. This verse has often been quoted as a justification for teaching people to develop a deeper love for themselves so that they can have a deeper love for others.⁶⁸ Bahr & Martin⁶⁹ assert that, if the call of Jesus in the second great commandment "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" has an effect, "then those who consider themselves Christians should manifest the fruit of such love. The more religious the person, presumably, the more evident the love of self and others." Bahr & Martin likely interpret Jesus' command to love your neighbour as equivocal to the phrase 'as yourself'.

Yet this view of the second great commandment is not shared by all scholars, and the proponents of this view are criticised for importing a psychological notion and forcing it into the text.⁷⁰ France⁷¹ asserts that the self-love that Jesus assumes, is a self-orientation that must be overcome rather than encouraged. Yet, when we look at the immediate context of Leviticus 19:18, we can gain a greater understanding of the nature of this love of self. This instruction to 'love your neighbour as you love yourself' is added for the purpose of providing a principle for the treatment of others (and strangers Leviticus 19:33-34) in areas that are not covered by laws of Leviticus 19:9-17.⁷² The self-love that Jesus and Moses appear to be referring to does not seem to be the sinful, self-orientation of France, nor the self-love of the self-esteem movement that is about valuing oneself, but refers to the innate human desire for things such as: food when one is hungry, nice clothes, a comfortable place

⁶⁸ V A Froehle, *Loving Yourself More: 101 Meditations on Self-Esteem for Women* (United States of America: Ave Maria Press Inc., 2007); J Meyer, "Loving God, Yourself and Others," https://www.joycemeyer.org/articles/ea.aspx?article=loving_god_yourself_and_others; Bahr and Martin, "And Thy Neighbour as Thyself: Self-Esteem and Faith in People as Correlates of Religiosity and Family Solidarity."

⁶⁹ Bahr and Martin, "And Thy Neighbour as Thyself: Self-Esteem and Faith in People as Correlates of Religiosity and Family Solidarity," 132.

⁷⁰ Makujina, "The Second Greatest Commandment and Self-Esteem," 224.

⁷¹ France, *Matthew: An Introduction and Commentary*: 323.

⁷² Makujina, "The Second Greatest Commandment and Self-Esteem," 214.

to live, security from calamity and violence, good grades, and so on.⁷³ This interpretation appears to be congruous with Edward's natural love - the natural human orientation toward personal enjoyment and wellbeing,⁷⁴ and is not a type of self-love that has to do with self-value. In addition, when Jesus quotes Leviticus 19 in Matthew 22:37-39, He subordinates the love of neighbour and the love of self, to the love of God – so we can see that Jesus never intended the love of neighbour and the love of self to be independent pursuits, but to occur within a covenantal framework.

The issue of self-esteem (the valuing of oneself) needs to be seen in the light of how and why humanity was created. The idea that humans could have value independently, in their own right, without reference to anything else (via the love of self) is not ultimately possible, because we were made to derive intrinsic value from an extrinsic source. Human value is always derivative; humanity cannot define themselves within their own limits.⁷⁵ We are valuable because God made us, loves us and He values us.⁷⁶

Any self-love that has as its objective the acquisition of value, is ultimately opposed to God and His derived intrinsic value. In working to establish value independently of God, humanity erects a worship structure where they love themselves and the idols that they think will bring them value.

Self-Love is Idolatry and Leads to Idolatry

Self-esteem and self-love are a part of the broader culture's need theory (for example Maslow's⁷⁷ hierarchy of needs) that Christians seem to have absorbed. When humanity places the self and its needs in the centre, the self is in the position that most cultures reserve for their gods.⁷⁸ In focussing on our needs, we can easily fall into the trap of making God our servant and placing ourselves in the centre, rather than God. This is the temptation that Lewis⁷⁹ warns of in *Mere Christianity*; "The moment you have a self at all there is a possibility of putting yourself first – wanting to be the centre – wanting to be God, in fact." The desire to have ourselves in the centre, even if it is because we are needy, is in stark contrast to the summary of the commandments given by Jesus - which was to love God and

⁷³ Piper, "Love Your Neighbour as Yourself, Part 2".

⁷⁴ Stadelmann, *Love and Politics: A New Commentary on the Song of Songs*: 92.

⁷⁵ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*: 44.

⁷⁶ Long, *Generating Hope: A Strategy for Reaching the Postmodern Generation*: 168.

⁷⁷ Maslow, *Toward a Psychology of Being*.

⁷⁸ Grenz, *The Social God and the Relational Self: A Trinitarian Theology of the Imago Dei*: 226.

⁷⁹ Lewis, *Mere Christianity*: 50.

to love others as our highest priority (Mark 12:30-31). Whenever Christians, and the broader culture, make the filling of their needs the objective, the end result is self-obsession and a deeper mess. In contrast, on the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus commanded people from a subsistence economy, not to worry about what they would eat, drink or wear. He told them to set their sights on the Kingdom of God and assured them that He would look after them (Matthew 6:25-34).

This approach of Jesus, though, is counter-intuitive, and humanity continues to place itself in the centre. When they do, they begin climbing up ladders (or worshipping idols) that they think will take them to a place of value, but in reality, whilst these ladders appear to take them somewhere, they actually go nowhere.⁸⁰ This worship is an expression of self-love and self-salvation. God speaks to this deception through His prophet Jeremiah when He says:

Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom, let not the mighty man boast in his might, let not the rich man boast in his riches, but let him who boasts boast in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the LORD who practices steadfast love, justice, and righteousness in the earth. For in these things I delight, declares the LORD.

The people that Jeremiah is referring to, love themselves. They love the inherent strengths they have (wisdom and strength), the items they own (riches), and are confident that those things make them someone significant, someone valuable. Yet God, through Jeremiah, works to recalibrate the values of His people and put them in “proper perspective.”⁸¹ God calls His people away from trusting in strength, riches and wisdom for esteem,⁸² to reorientating to, and knowing, Him. This is a small microcosm of the way that humanity tends to deal with the struggle of value in a post-fall world; they have moved away from deriving value intrinsically and default to acquiring it instrumentally.

These two different approaches to value, instrumental and intrinsic, are the ones that humanity tends to trade in the most. Intrinsic value is when an object has value in and of itself. The value of the object is internal to the object, and is not affected by the function of the object. In contrast, if an object has instrumental value then it is valuable for what it is useful for.⁸³ When it ceases being useful, then it ceases to have value. Human beings were created with derived, intrinsic value. They were never created to have value independently,

⁸⁰ John Azumah, "Islam and Contextualisation: Clarifications, Questions and a Plea from Africa," (Larnaca, Cyprus: The Challenge of Uniqueness: the Gospel in a Plural Society, 2009), 9.4.

⁸¹ Craigie, *Jeremiah 1-25*: 153.

⁸² C L Feinberg, *Jeremiah*, ed. F E Gaebelein, The Expositors Bible Commentary: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Lamentations, Ezekiel (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1986). 444.

⁸³ M Penner, "End of Life Ethics: A Primer," Stand to Reason, <http://www.str.org/articles/end-of-life-ethics-a-primer#.VZCF0o0w81V>.

but to get it from another source – namely God. God has created us in such a way that we become like the god that we worship.⁸⁴ When God’s people went after false idols, they became false (2 Kings 17:15); when they worshipped worthless idols, they became worthless (Jeremiah 2:4); when humanity worships gods that are nothing, it is no surprise that they end up becoming, and feeling like, nothing (Isaiah 41:24). Our value is connected to who or what we worship. In the Garden of Eden, Adam and Eve unceasingly worshipped God and were highly valuable because they were connected to, and imaging, the most valuable being in the universe. But when sin and pride entered the world, humanity turned away from the one who brings true value, and began worshipping created things with little or no value. The result of this is that humanity has turned from the source of intrinsic value, and has climbed on the treadmill of instrumental value, on which much energy is expended, and little gain is realised. We think we are valuable because we are rich, strong or wise (Jeremiah 9:23-24). We no longer want to turn back to the one that can bring us solid, intrinsic value, so we make gods out of creation, to save us (Isaiah 57:13) and to add value to us, instrumentally.

The shift in our source of value has led us to a place where our ‘self-esteem’, or sense of value, has become heavily dependent on our culture’s prescription of what we should be. When the possession of created things begins to feed into personal identity, creation has transitioned into a false god in the heart of the worshipper. Some people seem to be able to make these false gods ‘work for them,’ but even if one is to get to the top of a ladder that culture values, they haven’t arrived anywhere that matters.⁸⁵ In contrast, those towards the bottom of the ladders tend to be those that we would say have poor self-esteem. Either way, whether someone is successful at climbing the ladders or not, they are all engaged in the same attempt to gain independent value, instrumentally.

Reorienting to God Restores Value

The core issue for humanity is not the need for self-love, but a reorientation to God, and an imaging of God, as the only source of value. Humanity will never be more who God originally created them to be, than when they are not in the centre. The evidence that we have been reoriented to God will be when we neither exalt, nor degrade ourselves, but when we esteem *the* image of God in man, Jesus Christ.⁸⁶ God did not create us to be self-referential or

⁸⁴ Feinberg, *Jeremiah*: 388.

⁸⁵ Azumah, "Islam and Contextualisation: Clarifications, Questions and a Plea from Africa," 9.4.

⁸⁶ Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*: 45.

self-obsessed, but to be centred upon Him. This kind of repentance deals with the insatiable black hole of image, identity and value that humanity sets up in the centre of their souls. Though counter-intuitive, when people abandon their vain attempts to acquire value outside of their created anthropology, and instead turn to Jesus as the supremely valuable one, then they will find, ironically, that they are significantly valuable (Matthew 6:26).

If people stubbornly maintain their independence and try to look after themselves, then they act just like the first Adam (Genesis 3:7). But when they approach the Father through the grace purchased by the second Adam, then they will see the eyes of a loving father who desires to cover their shame (Ezekiel 16:8) and free them of the cancerous addiction they have to themselves. His son Jesus, the perfect image of God (Hebrews 1:3), imaged us on the cross, so that those who were worthless would take on His infinite value (2 Corinthians 5:21) and be renewed imagers of Him. He will break through the deception that human pride has set up, and lead people to a place where there is no competition, no shame, no anxiety, and no fear; only complete dependence upon Him. When people are focussed on imaging and worshipping God, and not on their own glory, they will love God and others because that is what He does; ultimately, paradoxically, this results in the recognition of the individual's worth.

God's objective is to recreate, restore and redeem that which was lost. The self seemed to be either silent, or perhaps even singing prior to the fall (as suggested by A J Culp on 17 August 2015), yet after the fall, under the influence of the shame that was coupled with disordered worship, the self began to scream. The self will not quiet, or begin to sing again, through the efforts of self-love. It will only be satisfied and harmonious when it is reoriented to the one upon whom it was made to centre. The original created posture of the self was extrospective not introspective, and it is only when this posture is corrected that the self will be restored.