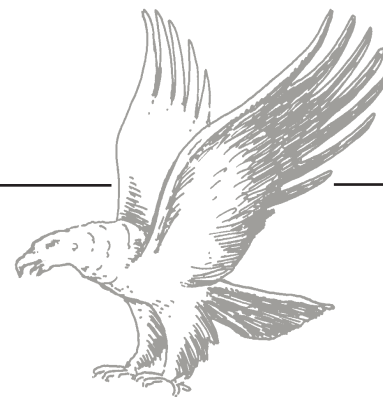


Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



May 3, 2015

What Men Esteem Highly

So much of our daily lives is wasted trying to gain the approval of others based on external characteristics. Jesus points us to another, more important, measure of self-worth.

“You are those who justify yourselves before men, but God knows your hearts. For what is highly esteemed among men is an abomination in the sight of God” (Lk. 16:15).



Of all the traits that define our humanity, perhaps the greatest is our intense desire for the approval of others. In one form or another, we crave the assurance that others not only accept us but like us. And we will pay almost any price to get that affirmation.

We see this desire for acceptance among the rich, famous, and powerful. Politicians plaster their names and pictures (and, oh yes, their accomplishments for the Little Guy) all over the news. Celebrities pose for the cameras at their congratulatory awards ceremonies. Journalists knock themselves out—even to the point of falsifying the facts—for a Pulitzer or a Peabody. Academicians strut their profundities (to much applause) at their high-brow conferences. The ultra-wealthy carouse together at their posh Caribbean resorts. The common thread that ties all these

groups together is a deep desire for the adulation of their peers. They are seeking to “justify themselves before men.”

Jesus saw plenty of this kind of behavior during His ministry, and much of His teaching exposed the foolishness of this mindset. The standards by which men seek approval from one another are almost always superficial and shallow—wealth, good looks, social connections, intellect, athletic prowess. None of these things define who we really are.

But this phenomenon is not limited to the high and mighty. The rest of us mere mortals display the same trait in more modest ways. How often do we make decisions in our everyday life in hope that “now they will like me”? That’s called “peer pressure,” and it’s not limited to teenagers.

Moreover, Jesus taught that even *moral virtue* can become a tool of vain self-promotion. When we wear our piety as a badge of superiority, as the Pharisees did, what are we doing but seeking the adoration of others? How are we any different from the celebrities who bask in the praise of their peers?

The common element in all these standards is the desire to establish our self-worth on the basis of *our performance*—to convince those around us that we are better, smarter, stronger, more praiseworthy—or holier—than our peers. We want people to like us because of *how we perform* in our life.

But Jesus sweeps all these pretensions aside with a stark declaration: These external metrics are not what God looks at. We are all, *every last one of us*, sinners with serious flaws, and we’re kidding ourselves if we think our outward achievements will earn us a ticket to heaven. No, God judges all of us on the basis of what is in our hearts. On that standard, the proud person occupies a very precarious position, regardless of what he owns or achieves or knows.

The things that men esteem highly are worthless in the sight of God. Once we understand that fundamental fact, we can quit with all the posturing that consumes so much of our outward lives, and concentrate on what really matters: developing a heart of love that produces the fruit of true righteousness.

– David King