

The Power of Personal Beliefs
Romans 12:2 - December 29, 2009
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When I was five or six, my older sister and I took a Sunday afternoon half a mile hike to a rugged piece of farm land owned by my grandfather. We came upon a weeping willow tree which invited us to climb its low lying branches. I recall climbing the branch on an incline until I was right above a barbed wire fence. I promptly fell out of the tree, onto the rusty wire, puncturing a nasty hole in the calf of my leg. Blood poured out. My sister tied my T-shirt around my leg and I hobbled back home. I still have a scar as a reminder.

As a result of this episode, what did I come to believe? No one had to remind me that it was dangerous to climb a tree over a barbed wire fence. The wound healed but the scar remains as a reminder of this lesson of life.

A physical scar says the body has done its job; healing has taken place. What is more difficult to detect are the emotional scars that hide festering wounds which still release toxins into our thought processes which in turn affects our emotions and our actions. We might diagram this chain reaction like this:

Situations ⇒ Beliefs ⇒ Thoughts ⇒ Emotions ⇒ Actions

One reason the first three chapters of Genesis is so important is that it provides insight into how humanity came to be as messed up as we are. God warned Adam and Eve to “*not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die*” (Gen. 2:17). Then along comes our adversary who tempts Eve with a false belief, “*Did God really say, ‘You must not eat from any tree in the garden?’ ... ‘You will not surely die,’*” the serpent said to the woman. “*For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.*” She saw that “*the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked...*” Gen. 3:1-7)

Situations ⇒ Beliefs ⇒ Thoughts ⇒ Emotions ⇒ Actions

Prior to Adam and Eve’s sin they enjoyed a perfect relationship with their Creator and with one another. They had the honor of being created in God’s image, not physical image, but spiritual and relational image. Their belief system of innocence and trust toward God, crumbled and they were left with guilt, shame, loss of position, and confusion. A new but false belief system became a part of who Adam and Eve were. We are still affected today by the false beliefs Satan planted in their minds and which have been passed down from generation to generation.

What is this false belief? Satan had planted **false beliefs** that they could find their worth apart from God. Satan influenced them to look for independence from their Creator. What they found was corruption of their once perfect human nature.

From that time to this human beings have sought to find an inner sense of self-worth apart from God. Satan promises to fill the void but never does and never will because he cannot. So where does man turn? He turns to himself, to what he thinks, or what he can do on his own. Plus he turns to what others think; the opinions others have of him. So imperfect, broken humanity seeks to find inner peace and self-worth from those who are just as broken as they are. Satan loves that it is so.

Situations ⇒ Beliefs ⇒ Thoughts ⇒ Emotions ⇒ Actions

We can look at our own lives and see how we have been affected by this same spiritual death. From birth, we all experience a multitude of life situations. Some are good, others are not. **We know that early life experiences are extremely influential in shaping the way we view ourselves and handle life.** For example, a child being raised by outwardly loving, nurturing, and encouraging parents will have the greatest chance of developing a healthier sense of self-worth. However, too much attention, pampering, and spoiling of a child might produce a self-centered, arrogant child. A child with parents who lack the ability or the desire to love and nurture their children, or who are overly harsh and demanding, or who abuse them physically, verbally or emotionally will instill into the child the beliefs that they are worthless and will never amount to anything.

We all grow up forming beliefs about ourselves. The more accurate these are the healthier we will be. The opposite is also true. The more these beliefs are based on untruths, distortions, and imperfections the more emotionally scarred and broken we will be.

Sadly, a child or teenager cannot always distinguish what is truth or what is a lie about what they believe about themselves. Given the nature of our broken, messed up world, it is easy to end up living our lives by a lot of misguided and inaccurate beliefs.

Here are four false beliefs that fundamentally affect all of us to one degree or another:

1. *I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself.*
2. *I must have the approval of others to feel good about myself.*
3. *Those who fail, including me, are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished.*
4. *I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.*

Situations ⇒ Beliefs ⇒ Thoughts ⇒ Emotions ⇒ Actions

Let's see how one of the above false beliefs can affect our lives. Suppose you were to complete a task but it didn't turn out as well as you would have liked. Your belief is: *I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself.* So you begin to analyze the job you did and you conclude that it wasn't as good as it could have or should have been. Based on your false belief you begin to feel like a failure and depression sets in. You begin to act out through self-loathing, tearing yourself apart verbally, or through working harder and harder, or perhaps through withdrawing into the darkness of your emotional closet to avoid anyone who might agree that you are a failure.

These are unhealthy, learned responses that are based on lies, false beliefs and they seem as natural to us as breathing. We think they are true. To think and act in any other way seems impossible. Therefore we stay trapped in sick cycles that repeat themselves over and over. Can you identify with this sort of living?

I have some really good news for all of us. **God desires to restore within us the self-worth that sin has robbed us of.** He wants to make us whole and healthy so that we can once again honor and glorify Him with our total self. The source of this true self-worth is found only in a relationship with God through His Son, Jesus Christ. According to Robert McGee, in his book, **The Search For Significance**, true biblical self-worth "*is an accurate perception of ourselves, God, and others based on the truths of God's Word.*"

Therefore we need to reprogram our mind. The Apostle Paul said it like this: "***Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and***

approve what God's will is - his good, pleasing and perfect will' (Rom. 12:2). This renewing of our minds is a progressive, ongoing process of understanding our new identity in Christ. Not only do we need to understand God's truth but we need to learn how to live by it.

Here is an overview of some of the new beliefs we need to grasp deeply so that we can live freed from old sin based false beliefs. I will state the false belief then I'll state the biblical truth on which a true self-worth can be based.

FB: I must meet certain standards to feel good about myself.

TB: Justification, which means that we are completely forgiven and fully pleasing to God.

FB: I must have the approval of others to feel good about myself.

TB: Reconciliation, which means we are totally accepted by God.

FB: Those who fail, including me, are unworthy of love and deserve to be punished.

TB: Propitiation, which means we have the capacity to experience God's love deeply because we no longer will fear punishment or punish others.

FB: I am what I am. I cannot change. I am hopeless.

TB: Regeneration, which means we have been made brand new, complete in Christ.

As we seek to explore and understand each of these in the weeks to come, keep in mind that while there may be a "break through" in understanding for some, you should expect emotional/spiritual healing to be a slow but positive process. We didn't get the way we are over night and we cannot expect to be restored to emotional/spiritual health over night either.

I want to close with five steps that are critical to the process of rediscovering our self-worth in Christ:

1. **Honesty.** We have to become aware of the deep emotional wounds, needs, and false beliefs that we've been living by. This requires honest and sometimes painful look deep within.
2. **Affirming Relationships.** Healing seldom happens in isolation. We need the love and affirmation of others who will not give us a quick and easy answer to a very complicated problem.
3. **Right Thinking.** We need to become aware of the tricks we play on ourselves and others. We have many defensive tactics that we use to keep from facing the truth. We need the truth of God's word to renew and reprogram our minds so that we begin thinking accurately.
4. **Holy Spirit.** The Holy Spirit communicates to us God's love, insight, forgiveness, and power to change. We cannot experience true lasting change without Him.
5. **Time.** It will take time. Be patient with yourself. Realize that total healing only happens in heaven.

Be encouraged. There is hope. Change begins by learning to identify the false beliefs you've lived by for years, discarding them, and embracing the new beliefs made possible by Christ living within you giving you a new self-Worth and a Christ centered identity. With new beliefs in place, our thinking changes, which influences our emotions and our actions. A new quality of life will emerge with our new Christ centered identity at the heart of it.