



# The Tri-Cities Edifier

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## Self-Image

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The title of this article does not raise the question of what we see when looking in a mirror. Rather, the issue is, how do we define ourselves? What is most meaningful in life? What do we want others to see in – or admire, or be inspired by – when they think of us? How do we see ourselves through the eyes of others?

All of us wish to be significant, to live a life of meaning and enjoy, to some degree, the admiration of others. But our value system will determine whether this desire is godly, appropriate and balanced, . absorbing Samuel's withering criticism, Saul pleaded: "I have sinned, yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the Lord your God" (2 Sam 15:30). Samuel knew Saul's last words were empty because of his foregoing request. Thus, "Samuel went no more to see Saul until the day of his death. Nevertheless, Samuel mourned for Saul" (15:35). Saul already elevated his reputation before the people above God in sparing Agag and the best of the Amalekites' possessions, and this remains his concern after Samuel's rebuke.

**Herod Agrippa I.** The story of Herod's journey from Roman prison to Palestinian king is an interesting one; Josephus adds extra-Biblical detail to his dramatic rise to power. But we only catch a tiny glimpse of that story in Acts 12. Herod clearly covets the approval of the Jewish leadership, for when he executed the apostle James he then condemned Peter to death because "it pleased the Jews" (12:1-3).

But God humbles him by the intervention of an angel who releases Peter from custody. Following this, and perhaps to regain some of his mojo, he presents himself gloriously before the people of Tyre and Sidon who had fallen into disfavor. They, too, wanted to restore themselves to the king's good graces, and when Agrippa stood before them in royal splendor "the people kept shouting, 'The voice of a god and not of a man!'" (12:21-22). Josephus adds that Herod wore a robe interlaced with silver which glistened in the morning sun. While basking in the glow of divine accolades, God struck him with agonizing, fatal disease.

Humans have an innate social drive for acceptance; we crave approval of families, friends and peers – sometimes even total strangers. God made us social creatures for various purposes: support, protection, emotional stability, instruction, etc. Mutual dependence is crucial to our survival and well-being.

But this becomes twisted and grotesque when selfishness and insecurity enter the picture and we define ourselves by the approval of others. This desire is so powerful that it can subvert belief in God: "Even among the rulers many believed in Him, but because of the Pharisees they did not confess Him, lest they should be put out of the synagogue; for they loved the praise of men more than the praise of God" (Jn 12:42-43). We can sell out our deepest convictions in order to curry human favor.

This craving of status, approval and admiration shows up in various ways:

\* Pressure to wear the right style, clothing label or otherwise conform to the latest fad (hairdo, eyebrow shape, color schemes, etc.).

\*The right accessories to signal cultural awareness and conformity: a Rolex watch; Wayfarer sunglasses; an iPhone, a diamond ring the size of a kumquat, etc.

\* On a grander scale: the yearning to live in an upscale neighborhood (with a coveted zip code); drive a Jaguar, Land Rover or Maserati; or even owning a more luxurious Learjet than the other guy.

It is not that such things are inherently wrong; rather, we go astray in the desire to define ourselves by them. First, God is easily ignored in this quest for social admiration. Further, such an appetite is insatiable, for the standard of “coolness” (yes, I’m a Boomer) always changes (as a consumer society, the powers that be constantly dictate what we need to buy, wear or drive to stay current). Also, such striving is never ending because someone else will always have more – more fame, more power, more stuff. By such standards, when does one have enough?

But we might be blinded by this weakness because we think only the uber-people – the mega-billionaires who own their own islands and 10,000 acre ranches – are susceptible to self-image issues. But this is not a problem merely for Jeff Bezos, Bill Gates or Elon Musk. It is a common tendency; the only difference is one of degree. We can become consumed with trying to meet the unreasonable expectations of parents. Fragile teens can be driven to suicide by online bullies who make acceptance impossible. Deep feelings of inadequacy, unattractiveness or awkwardness imprison us or lead us on a futile pursuit of the unattainable.

What is the solution? “But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by a human court. In fact, I do not even judge myself. For I know nothing against myself, yet I am not justified by this; but He who judges me is the Lord” ([2 Cor 4:3-4](#)). It’s not that other people’s views and opinions don’t matter; Paul makes it clear that he accounts for the weakness of others’ conscience. And while he tries to accommodate them, he defines himself by the standards of the Lord, to whom he (and all of us) will give account.

The ultimate question is: “What does **God** think of me?” Am I content to define myself by His standards? Am I satisfied to be the person He wants me to be, and thus be free from the hollow, shifting standards of culture? This is part of the liberty that Christ offers us – freedom from the shallow, carnal, unjust judgments of man and joyously pursuing the approval of God who is loving, merciful, gracious and patient.

Realigning ourselves with God’s values and gaining His acceptance is worth the effort. Those who do will be at peace with their shortcomings; unmoved by the instabilities of life. They will not self-centered but rather empowered to yield and put others above themselves. Is that the person someone sees when they look at you?

Via. *The Centreville Journal*