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Self-Centredness and Self-Glorification, a Form of Idolatry

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Exodus 20:4-5

God forbid idolatry. In Exodus 20:4-5 we read, "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image, or any likeness of any thing that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth: thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them." The definition of idolatry, according to Webster's, is "the worship of idols, or excessive devotion to, or reverence for, some person or thing." There are many forms of idolisation, but I wish to focus today on self-centredness and self-glorification, which is undoubtedly a dangerous form of idolatry, one that will eventually lead to the disastrous result of distancing oneself from God. The first sin in the world was committed when Satan persuaded Eve into thinking that her own will was self-sufficient, that humankind could be equal to God. Humanism, the prevailing philosophy of the modern era, unabashedly elevates the human being to the pedestal once occupied by God, and teaches the pre-eminence and autonomy of the human "self." We need not look far: the advent of social media, though good for both knowledge and better relationships, has driven this problem to its worst. The number of selfies we post is evidence enough of this.

When a person is preoccupied with himself or herself, it can show itself in various ways, such as self-absorption (narcissism), self-glorification (vanity, arrogance, boastfulness), self-service (selfishness, greed), self-will (stubbornness), and self-obedience (lawlessness). All of these, in levels beyond the normal, are self-destructive in terms of spirituality, though such people may not realise that something has gone wrong between them and Jesus. None of these should be mistaken for self-respect, which comes from one thing, and one thing only: doing our duty rightly before God. Doing our duty involves serving the needs of others, selflessly. When we become preoccupied with ourselves, we cease serving the needs of others, and begin to erode the very

foundation on which our self-respect is built. Ironically, the person obsessed with "finding himself" and "liking himself" is the very person least likely to do the things that would truly enable him to like himself. It is not at all surprising that the me-first generation is awash in self-loathing and self-fixation. Modern psychiatry and psychotherapy are doing precisely the thing that will make the problem worse: encouraging us to think and talk more about ourselves.

What we need to understand is that our being is mortal, with a limited existence, while our self can have a glorified existence in the presence of Jesus for eternity. This realisation should lead us to put Jesus first in our lives, so that our thoughts and deeds reflect Jesus, and not self. After all, Christianity is all about reflecting Jesus in us. Amen.

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