

Dear members and friends of St. John,

One of the great challenges of being a Christian is having to deal with **our own ego**. Webster defines the "ego" as the "mediator between the person and reality...by functioning both in the perception of and adaption to reality."¹ In other words, your ego allows you see yourself and deal with the world around you.

The ego, of course, is at the core of our sinful human nature. Tied to our self-esteem, our ego is always elevating our image of ourselves in relation to others. The secular world will tell you that **self-esteem and ego** are essential aspects of our ability to function as human beings, allowing us to be productive citizens. While true in general, the devil's in the details. The question becomes one of magnitude. **Egomaniacs** are people that have overextended egos that lead them to believe that they are at or near the center of their universe – that everything should revolve around what they say and think and do. Maybe you know of someone who suffers from this?

The root problem of an over-extended ego stems from our insistence on **elevating ourselves above others** – most especially **above our Lord**. This is contrary to God's word, and therefore is NOT pleasing to our Lord. Let me give you some examples of what God has to say on this subject of self-esteem and ego.

Romans 12:2, 3: *"Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that by testing you may discern what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect. For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you **not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think**, but to think with sober judgment, **each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned.**"* [ESV]

Luke 14:7-10: *"Now [Jesus] told a parable to those who were invited, when he noticed how they chose the places of honor, saying to them, 'When you are invited by someone to a wedding feast, do not sit down in a place of honor, lest someone more distinguished than you be invited by him, and he who invited you both will come and say to you, 'Give your place to this person,' and then you will begin with shame to take the lowest place. **But when you are invited, go and sit in the lowest place**, so that when your host comes he may say to you, 'Friend, move up higher.'" Then you will be honored in the presence of all who sit at table with you."* [ESV]

John 13:12-18: *"When [Jesus] had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, 'Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. Truly, truly, I say to you, **a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him.** If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them.'"* [ESV]

1 Peter 2:16-20: *"Live as people who are free, not using your freedom as a cover-up for evil, but **living as servants of God**. Honor everyone. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the emperor. **Servants, be subject to your masters with all respect, not only to the good and gentle but also to the unjust.** For this is a gracious thing, when, mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly. For what credit is it if, when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? But if when you do good and suffer for it you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God."*

Matthew 20:16: [Jesus said:] **"So the last will be first, and the first last."** [ESV]

These texts barely scratch the surface of what God has to say about our relationship to Him and others as *willing servants*. **Ultimately, the ego *must* be placed in submission to the Lord.** Again, we'll imagine that this is something we can do (that darn ego again!). We cannot. By the power of the Holy Spirit, we are able to be **put into submission to Jesus Christ**. Remember the words of God in Romans 12:2 (above): "...*be transformed by the renewal of your mind...*" (a continuing action of God in you). God is working to change your heart and mind. **This is critical for us. He uses His word and His sacraments to transform us – to make us see and think and speak like Christ sees and thinks and speaks.** This is a life-long process, and we'll never be completely transformed this side of heaven. However, as Christ becomes our center, the way we see and relate to our neighbor (ego) becomes altered by God.

Ultimately, the human ego is a gift from God. But it was **never** meant to be overextended, to the point that **God and others are in subjection to you**. It was meant to draw its strength from God's Holy word. The Gospel of Jesus Christ allows us to see **our value** in relation to **the cross of Christ**. When you see Christ on the cross, dying with YOUR sins, because He loves YOU so very much – when you see Christ rise from the tomb and ascend into heaven, to prepare a place for YOU forever – then, and only then, can your self-esteem be rooted in God's never ending love for you. Thus, we see the example of our Lord, as an example for our life. **Servanthood becomes the height of human existence. Sharing God's love with others is the pinnacle of achievement for any man or woman or child on the face of this earth.**

The world will continue to bombard us with secular psychology that relates **individual achievement** to **man's ability to elevate himself, by elevating his or her ego** ("YOU must elevate your self-esteem"). The truth is that when our egos are in submission to Christ – real and lasting human achievement becomes not only possible, but a guarantee from God Himself! May God help us always, to **see this truth about who we really are, and what we are truly worth**. Amen.

Pastor Travis

1. *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary, Eleventh Edition*, Springfield, MA, c. 2007.