



# BBC UPDATE

## THE WILL OF GOD AND PERSONAL HAPPINESS

### Part One: The Self-Esteem Movement & Christianity



Dr. M. Ryan Strouse

*“... If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me.” Luke 9:23*

#### ***How selfish are you?***

The secular model of self-will and self-esteem have insidiously infiltrated the discipleship doctrine of the “thy will be done” and turned it into “my will be done” (Lk.22:42). Suffering well and service to the LORD are two key areas undermined by the self-esteem movement that promotes selfishness and repulses any form of humble submission. It has blurred the distinction between external “happiness” and internal peace/joy in American Christianity; subsequently, the “*reasonable service*” of self-denial and submission to the LORD is furtively mitigated by the attractions of sight-based Christianity and no-cost discipleship. Even more, the doctrine of suffering bemoans the loss of “happiness” and physical things instead of focusing on the spiritual maturity that comes about from Divine crushing (Is.53:10; Job 23:10; Jms.1:3-5). For example, many hope in the “Job 42 package” of double physical blessings after a period of suffering, only to be disappointed with anything less; the point – there is a poverty on the value of deep dependence on the LORD among American Christians (Ps.31:22, 119:28). Summarily, disciples of Christ cannot expect the subjective nature of personal happiness to be achieved while pursuing the will of God. At one point in time, one will have to bow to the other; either the will of God or personal happiness.

The underlying principle of secular therapy and counseling is the pursuit of personal happiness led by the “validity and veracity” of one’s own (ever-changing) feelings (Jer.2:36; Eph.4:14). In essence, if a relationship, job, or challenge gets in the way of your personal happiness – get rid of it! Obviously, this is contrary to the example of Christ for Christians; “... *in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves*” (Phil.2:1-10). Consequently, this error promotes the dissolution of marriages, the discarding of children, and causes division in assemblies.

The Adamic curse has driven each of our deceitful and desperately wicked hearts to pursue self-will in overt and covert ways (Jer.17:9; Jms.1:13-15), which is anti-Royal Law and in the spirit of anti-Christ (Mt.22:37-40; Phil.2:4-10). Furthermore, Satan himself is the original fomenter of self-will. Isaiah 14:12-14 reveals Lucifer’s five “*I will*” statements of selfish intent over and above what Jehovah provided him. Lastly, the world under the deceptive rule of Satan promotes the Gnostic system of self-will in vast array of ways, which will be discussed further in the next section (I Jn.2:15-17). Have you considered your own selfishness recently?

# THE SELF-ESTEEM MOVEMENT & CHRISTIANITY

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Maybe you say, “So what? I go to church and follow its communal checklist.” Checklists are easy; surrendering the throne of your heart to Christ is *the* battle. In a broad stroke, American Christians attempt to serve *both* God and mammon (Mt.6:24). We are so used to having our cake and eating it too; we crumble under the slightest hint of not getting our own way in a cultural context of excessive abundance. Hence, churches promote a narrow scope of the Gospel in a sight-based fashion to call the victims that did not get life on their own terms...as if the Gospel would fix that problem (Lk.9:62; Mt.11:3; I Cor.15:31). However, this “philosophy of ministry” comes to a screeching halt when faithful Candlesticks declare how our Master, the Suffering Servant and Man of Sorrows who submitted to the will of the Father, calls us to die to self and carry our cross as we follow Him (Lk.9:23). Herein lies the distinction between Candlestick assemblies that remember their first love and the neon lights that temper the Fear of God and promote vanity (Rev.2:1-5). Let us consider how the Gnostic System of Self-Will has exacerbated our old man and infiltrated our churches.

A few questions to assess yourself and your assembly:

- What kind of disciples does your assembly make (Lk.9:23)?
- Do we recognize most relationships encounter trouble through selfishness and require repentance for reconciliation?
- Do you look for the spiritual maturing of yourself in suffering and disappointment (Job 19:28, 23:10)?
- Do you enable those who don’t get their way in life?
- Are the crutches of sight-based Christianity required to walk forward in faith and obedience?
- How is Christian maturity measured in your assembly? Patient dependence on Christ (Jms.1:3-5, 5:10-11)?
- How do you guide those who don’t get life on their own terms?
- How do you reconcile personal happiness and doing the will of God?

## ***Our Greatest Idol: Self-Will***

The Gnostic (*gnosis = knowledge*) lies of the Garden were deathlessness and deification of man; in essence, Adam and Eve could have secured immortality and deity through the secret knowledge (lies) provided by the serpent (Lucifer). The Garden Gnostic system has spawned innumerable gnostic systems under a variety of veils (Cults, Scientology, Mormonism, Yoga, etc.). Members of these systems climb the “ladder” through varying levels that require secret knowledge to ascend to the next, which climaxes at the “pleroma” or fullness of GOD-hood. The Gnostic system of self-will is a subtle system that is anchored in secular psychotherapy that promotes the insatiable pursuit of happiness and vanity. Sadly, this philosophy has crept into churches, pastors, and Christians. How often does “me, myself, and I” trump obedience to Christ within our hearts?

The two primary lies of this system are: 1) we are morally good and our “inner child” or deity needs to advance, and 2) our feelings equal truth...so follow them. Most Christians will

# THE SELF-ESTEEM MOVEMENT & CHRISTIANITY

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outright deny the first lie of innate morality; however, the second lie of feelings equating truth is the greater struggle. Scripture easily exposes the error of this so called “secret knowledge.” Ecclesiastes 7:20 states, “*For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.*” Isaiah 40:7 states the fickleness of man, “*The grass withereth, the flower fadeth: Because the spirit of the LORD bloweth upon it: Surely the people is grass.*” Man is wonderfully designed and loved by the Creator, but nevertheless sinful, fickle, and void of sound decision making apart from Truth (Prov.19:21).

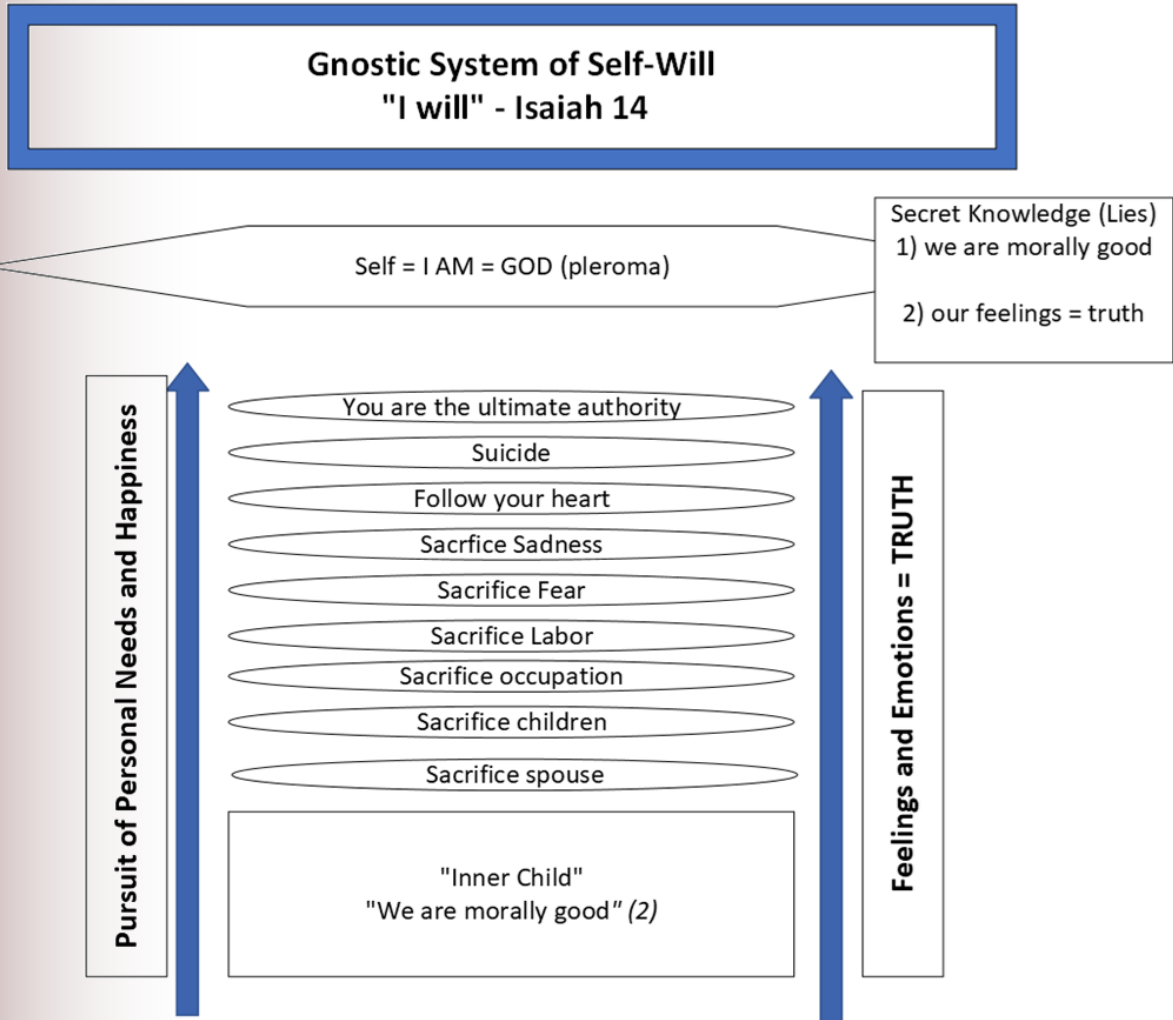
Philosopher Daniel Robinson talks about the great courage and integrity required to be selfish, “*To honor the self is to be in love with our own life, in love with our possibilities for growth and for the experiencing of joy, in love with the process of discovery and exploring our distinctively human potentialities. Thus we can begin to see that to honor the self is to practice selfishness in the highest, noblest, and the least understood sense of the word, and this, I shall argue, requires enormous independence, courage, and integrity.*” Philosophy such as this is sown in the context of marital discord, and reaps the fruit of divorce. In essence, “I am not getting what I want from my spouse, they are blocking me from the unknown possibility of happiness, and I will take the courage to leave them and find happiness in doing what I want.” Similarly in the context of child-rearing, children are overtly or covertly discarded into the hands of others for child-rearing. Biblical marriage and parenting are hard work. They require self-lessness, attention, care, consistency, and the grace of the Lord (Eph.5:22-32; 6:1-3).

The individual that follows their feelings (their deceptive and wicked heart) in pursuit of happiness will attempt to discard any relationship, job, church, or experience that impedes the subjectivity of their personal happiness. Samuel Coleridge revealed the end goal of selfishness, “*We begin with the I KNOW MYSELF, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD.*” He reveals the gnostic undertones of pursuing selfishness to have ultimate authority in one’s life...sounds a great deal like Lucifer “*I will be like the most High*” (Is.14:14). Our greatest idol is self-will instead of the Lord’s will.

- How much of self-will has crept into your church, relationships, marriage, or parenting?
- What about the Royal Law – is our daily focus obeying the Lord and loving the unlovable in our life?
- Are you using the blessings of the LORD to turn your church or children into selfish adults?
- Who is the true Master of your life? Christ, mammon, or self?

How much happiness did the Savior incur as He obeyed the Father? What about those in the hall of faith (Heb.11:26)? Did Christ do cartwheels through the will of God with ease (Lk.22:42)? He was the “*Man of Sorrows*” who “*for the joy that was set before him endured the cross*” (Heb.12:2). He had internal joy obeying the Father amid the external firestorm that was His life. The Lord Jesus Christ set the perfect example for Christians in His earthly ministry. He set out to do the will of God despite the cost, which resultingly gained him the title of “*Man of Sorrows*” and glorified the Father! See Part Two “*Man of Sorrows*” in the next Update.

# THE SELF-ESTEEM MOVEMENT & CHRISTIANITY



"We begin with the I KNOW Myself, in order to end with the absolute I AM. We proceed from the SELF, in order to lose and find all self in GOD." (1)

"Becoming one with the infinite. by realizing that your soul is a perfect reflection of God or cosmic consciousness, your'e able to unite your soul with that consciousness."

"To honor the self is to be in love with our own life, in love with our possibilities for growth and for the experiencing of joy, in love with the process of discovery and exploring our distinctively human potentialities. thus we can begin to see that to honor the self is to practice selfishness in the highest, noblest, and the least understood sense of the word. and this, i shall argue, requires enormous independence, courage, and integrity." (3)

## References:

- 1) Coleridge, Samuel. *Biographia Literaria*. (1817)
- 2) Williams, Todd. *Los Angeles Times*, July 29, 1995
- 3) Robinson, D. *An Anthology of Modern Philosophy*. NY: Thomas Crowell, 1931, p.508.
- 4) Branden, Nathaniel. *Honoring the Self: Personal Integrity and the Heroic Potentials of Human Nature* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1983, p.4

## SURPRISE VISIT

We had a surprise visit from friends of the past. Dr. Ed and Vicky Smith from Chesapeake, VA were traveling through CT, and stopped by and visited. Dr. Smith received his Doctor of Religious Education degree in the last graduation class of my ministry at Tabernacle Baptist Theological Seminary in Virginia Beach, VA. He and his wife ministered with us as I started Emmanuel Baptist Theological Seminary in Newington, CT. Dr. Smith helped with the herculean task of organizing and promoting the seminary in 2000 under the *aegis* of Emmanuel Baptist Church. We talked about the fond memories we had in seminary life in VA as well as the two years they were with us in the new seminary. Now they are ministering in their home church as well as helping other ministries.

## MOTHER'S DAY



*The mothers of BBC celebrated a beautiful day where the men and children treated the moms to a "day off" from the weekly meal by providing lunch and desserts. The ladies also received a lovely Mother's Day gift bag.*

## BBC/BBTS 2023/2024 SCHEDULE

**May 22-26**  
**Ireland Module**  
*Gospel of Luke and Medical Language Acts 1-9*

**June 5-9**  
**Community Baptist Church**  
Coopersburg, PA  
*Book of Hebrews*

**July 24-28**  
**Calvary Independent Baptist Church**  
Plymouth, NH  
*The Johannine Epistles*

**September 25-29**  
**Bible Baptist Church**  
Nashua, NH  
*Book of Hebrews*

**October 22-25**  
**Willow Grove Baptist Church**  
Waynesburg, PA  
*Timeless Truths Bible Conference*

**October 28-29**  
**Calvary Baptist Church**  
Mannington, WV  
*TBA*

**November 3**  
**BBTS Fall Lecture Series**  
Galilean Baptist Church  
Stafford Springs, CT  
*TBA*

**December 10**  
**Commencement Service**  
Seoul, Korea

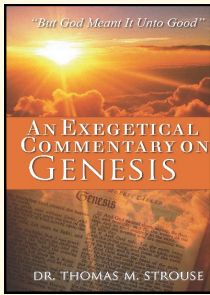
### 2024

**January 1-5, 2024**  
**Ireland Module**  
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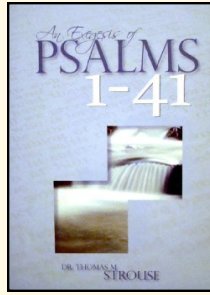
**January 15-19, 2024**  
**Fairhaven Baptist College**  
Chesterton, IN  
*Module TBA*

**Feb 26-March 1, 2024**  
**Philippines Module**  
Quezon City  
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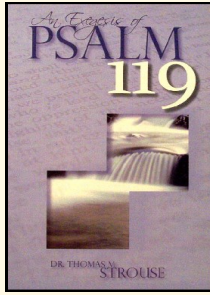
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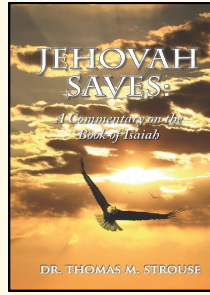
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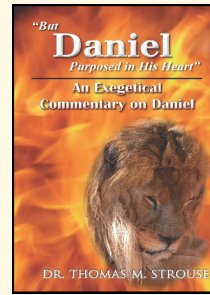
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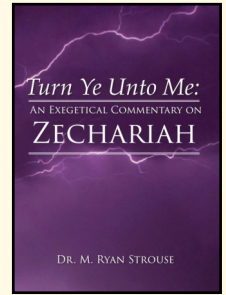
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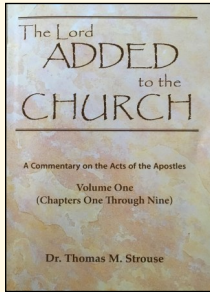
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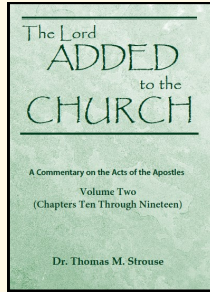
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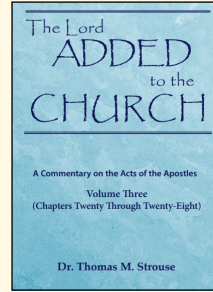
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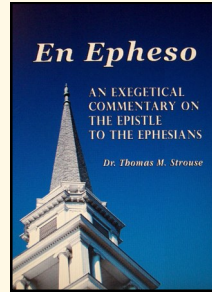
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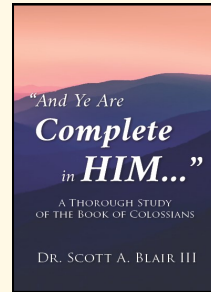
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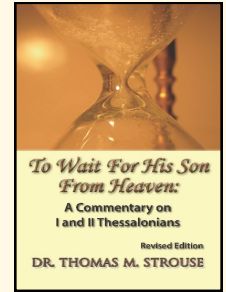
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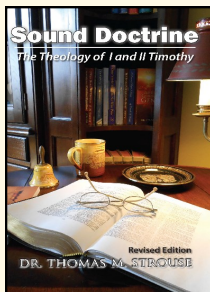
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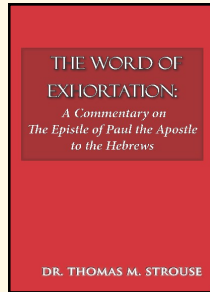
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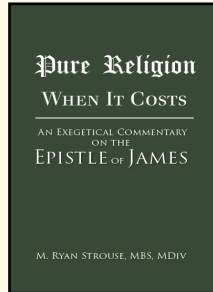
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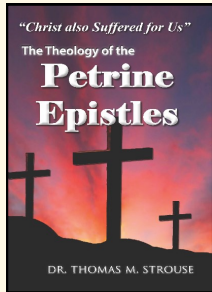
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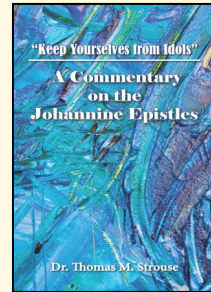
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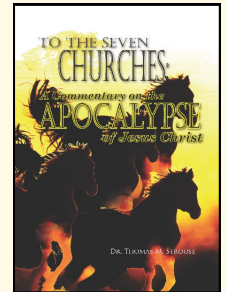
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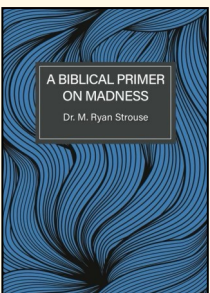
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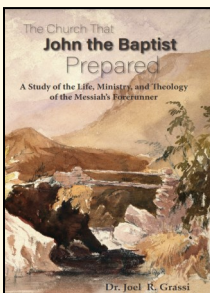
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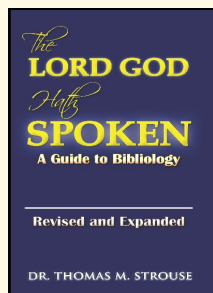
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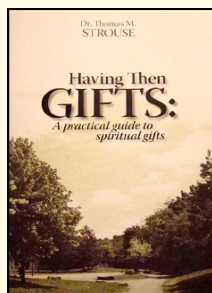
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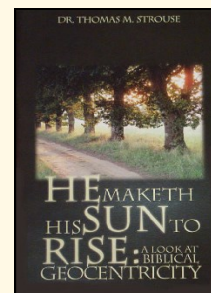
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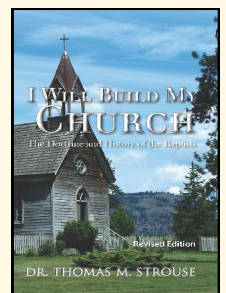
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