

The Perilous Problem of Pride

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Introduction

Who is the most conceited person in the world? The one who calls Dial-a-prayer to see if there are any messages for them. Some are so conceited they think God changes his opinions to suit their needs. Man is the only animal that you can pat on the back and his head swells.

We need to be clear about what something is not, as well as about what it is. We need to blast before we can build. The same word can be used in different ways to refer to different things, and in so doing the word changes its meaning. Pride can refer to a virtue; such as, a man can take pride in his work. The best kind of pride is that which compels a man to do his best even though no one is looking. Nothing is wrong with that. But that's not the usage that we will be considering here.

What is pride? There are many types or sources of pride. Pride results from: 1) The wealth that one has (gold-pride) or 2) The way that one looks (beauty-pride) or 3) The knowledge that one has (intellectual-pride) or 4) The skill that one has (performance-pride) or 5) The influence that one possesses (power-pride) or 6) The social status that one occupies (position-pride).

Is pride really a sin? Pride can be a sin depending on how one uses the word. There is a sinful evil pride that refers to what God resists and there is a pride that refers to the glory that God bestows. Today, when we speak about pride, we're referring to the egotistical/sinful pride the Bible speaks so much about.

Few things are fraught with more peril than the pervasive and persistent problem of pride. Pride is "*the sin of sins*" – the tap root of all our sin nature. The concept behind pride is the gratuitous gratification of our sin nature. Pride is essentially opposed to reason because it has to do with an inflated or unrealistic view of oneself or one's ability. For example, Paul says in Romans 12:3: "For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober [sound] judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you." Be realistic. Pride involves the desire for inordinate self-exaltation.

In the Bible, the sin of pride is directly opposed to the virtue of humility. Pride is an excessive belief in one's own abilities and it interferes with one's ability to recog-

nize the place that God rightly deserves and the grace of God in all of life. Pride is the sin of inordinate self-love, gratification and glorification.

Is pride the first sin of all? Pride is the sin from which all other sins arise. Could we say that inordinate self-love is the cause of every other sin? The root of pride is found in man not being subject to God and His Word. Pride has been referred to as the “*mother of all sins*.” Whenever a Christian fails in executing the plan of God for his life, sinful pride is usually the primary reason and the motivating cause.

What is God’s attitude toward pride?

Proverbs 8:13b – “I hate pride and arrogance”

Proverbs 3:34 – “He mocks proud mockers but gives grace to the humble”

James 4:6 – “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

1 Peter 5:5b: “All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Pride characterizes an arrogant atheist; **humility** characterizes a repentant Christian. That’s why Jesus said in Matthew 23:12, “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled and whoever humbles himself will be exalted.”

Who are these proud people that God resists?

A proud person is one with an impenitent heart. Such a person isn’t capable of loving in the way God intends. In 1 Corinthians 13:4, Paul says that “*Love [agape] does not boast [and] it isn’t proud.*” A proud person has an unhealthy attitude because of an unrealistic perspective. A proud person in some way wants to usurp the position due to God alone. We’re all familiar with the expression, “*Pride comes before the fall.*” God resists the proud not only in this life but throughout all eternity.

Who are those humble people that receive God’s grace?

They are the ones with a Christ like attitude and a servant spirit just like their Master – Jesus – who humbled Himself and became obedient. Jesus said, “*The Son of man came not to be served but to serve, to give His life as a ransom for many*” (Mark 10:45).

A humble person is willing to put God’s revelation above human reason.

A humble person has a sober recognition of their sin and God’s holiness and the God-given grace of repentance which says, “*God, be merciful to me, a sinner.*” God gives grace to the humble and they become new creatures in Christ.

A humble person glorifies God by living a life of faith and obedience out of love from the heart. The final exaltation will come when we lose our sin nature and receive resurrected bodies to enjoy for all eternity with God in heaven.

Where did pride come from?

You can’t spell sin or pride without an “I” being in the middle. Satan was the first creature guilty of the sin of pride. His motivation of pride is found most clearly in

Isaiah 14:14b where he said, *“I will make myself like the Most High.”* This sin of pride spoken of in Isaiah 14 and amplified in Ezekiel 28:14-17 involves exalting ourselves above God.

What is the cause of pride?

In 2 Corinthians 4:4 Paul says, “The god of this age has blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God. Satan engendered pride in Adam and Eve by lying and deceiving them concerning what God has said and concerning what would actually be in their best interest. He tempted them to question God’s wisdom and doubt God’s love. Satan’s primary weapon is deception and he uses that to divorce us from reality and blind us to the truth and to what is truly in our best interests. Our primary sin is failing to acknowledge God as God and to seek to usurp the place that God alone deserves – the throne in our hearts (Rom. 1:21). Anyone who occupies the throne of their heart is by definition self-centered –it can’t be otherwise.

What problems are associated with pride? The greatest of all faults is to imagine that you have none. The mental cases most difficult to cure are those people who are crazy about themselves. We all have weaknesses to which we are blind and one of our biggest blind spots is in the area of pride.

One of our greatest blind spots is we think we know ourselves and what is best for us. There can be very hurtful and sinful areas of our lives of which we’re unaware. People offend each other all the time and they aren’t aware of it.

Consider what the following Scriptures have to say on this subject:

Jeremiah 17:9 – “The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

Proverbs 14:12 – “There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.”

It’s precisely because we don’t know ourselves and what’s best for us that the writer of Proverbs says, “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5-6).

Because we’re blind to some of our own faults, we’re guilty of some of the very things we accuse others of doing. Paul referred to this in Romans 2:1: *“You, therefore, have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things.”*

We are all capable of conveniently forgetting what we have done that’s wrong. One of the problems we need to avoid is having a double standard – a lower one for us and a higher one for others. In order to counteract this tendency Jesus reminds us that: *we first need to take the log out of our own eye so we can see clearly in order to take the splinter out of someone else’s eye.* When the “I” becomes dominant, the “spiritual eye” sees the entire world in a distortion.

1) Have you ever identified what's behind the tendency to judge others so critically and constantly and yet we never seem to judge ourselves?

2) What is behind our unwillingness to admit we're wrong?

3) Why do you think we seek to exalt ourselves rather than God?

We can answer all these questions with one word: PRIDE. Temper and a loss of self-control is usually what gets us into trouble, but pride is what keeps us there. Why? Proud people don't want to admit they're wrong. The problem with a self-made man is that he worships his creator. Those who boast of being self-made men usually have a few critical parts that are missing.

What are some characteristics of pride? How can we describe sinful pride?

Pride is the fountain head of all our sinful attitudes.

Pride precedes and supports all the sinful attitudes we produce.

Pride is an exalted view of one's self totally divorced from reality and reason.

Pride is the antithesis of humility and fails to recognize the grace of God.

Pride is the excessive desire to be noticed by others.

Pride is the lust for the attention, approval and the praise of others.

Pride is the haughty contempt for others and the emptiness of vain glory.

Pride is an attitude which adversely affects motivation, decisions and actions.

Pride is associated with egotism (inflated ego) and vanity (self-admiration).

Pride is related to inordinate ambition and self-conceit (exaggerated ability).

Pride results in jealousy, bitterness, vindictiveness, revenge, self-pity.

Pride is described by Paul in 2 Timothy 3:2-7 as characteristic of *"the last days."*

Pride is related to the rejection of God's Word and the disobedience of His law.

Pride divorces people from reason and reality resulting in self-deception.

Pride inhibits wisdom and destroys the capacity for life, love and peace.

Pride says to God that we know better than He does what's best for us.

Pride implies that we're an exception to the moral principles in God's Word.

Pride is a large stone over which just about every body stumbles.

Pride is the only disease that makes every one around you sick of you.

Pride is the only poison that's good for you when it's swallowed.

Pride is a plant that doesn't grow well in the shadow of the Cross.

What are some of the negative consequences of pride?

The proud rebel against God's Word and reject God-given authorities. Pride reproduces itself in jealousy, bitterness, vindictiveness, revenge, gossip, slander, judging. Pride motivates emotional sins such as: fear, worry, anxiety, hatred, guilt complex and self-pity. Pride that is transformed into self-righteousness produces the deadly sins of legalism and judgementalism.

What is God's antidote for pride?

If the problem of pride comes from rebelling against and usurping God's authority, then the solution to pride would have to involve giving God His rightful place in our lives by acknowledging, respecting, trusting, loving and obeying God. The solution to pride would have to include becoming honest (agreeing with God) and repenting (changing our attitude), submitting ourselves to the authority of God and His Word and trusting that God is more loving and wise than we are. Pride deceives. Humility discerns.

Is there any way we can overcome our pride without giving up self-seeking and living for ourselves and begin living for the God who made us? Is there any substitute for daily self-surrender? Is it any wonder that Jesus said, *"If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me"* (Luke 9:23-25). Proverbs says, "To fear [the proper regard for] the LORD is to hate evil" (8:13a).

Sometimes we experience spiritual setbacks because we are guilty of wrong thinking and we can experience wrong thinking because we get caught up in the sin of worldly pride and self-centeredness (1 John 2:16).

What personal positive actions should we take when this happens?

"Unless we're humble, were sure to stumble" I like the little rhyme:

"Blessed Savior make us humble.

Take away our sinful pride;

In ourselves we're sure to stumble,

Help us stay close by Your side." (by Dr. De Haan)

A proud person is a foolish and unteachable person. A humble person is a teachable and wise person. Only the truly great are humble; only the humble are truly great. Humility is like underwear, you should have it but you should never show it. We should pray *"Lord, make me humble and when you do, don't let me know it."*

A humble person is honest and transparent and is not pretentious.

What's the bottom line?

You can't glorify the self and Savior at the same time. Jesus says, "For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?" (Luke 9:25)

According to C.S. Lewis the principle of giving up runs throughout life, from top to bottom: "Give up yourself and you will find your real self. Lose your life and you will save it. Submit to the death of your ambitions and your favorite wishes every day and the death of your whole body in the end, submit in every fiber of your being and you will find eternal life. Keep back nothing. Nothing that you have not given away will ever really be yours. Nothing in you that has not died will ever be raised from the dead. Look out for yourself and you will find in the long run, only hatred, loneliness,

despair, rage, ruin and decay. But look for Christ and you will find Him and with Him everything else thrown in.”

This truth underlies the Gospel. There’s no hope except by daily submitting and trusting God’s wise and loving purpose revealed in the person and work of Jesus Christ – whom to know rightly is eternal life.

What do we need to do?

What would God have us to do? We need to:

1. Stop justifying/excusing ourselves and recognize our need for God’s grace.
2. Stop judging others and focus on doing what we know God wants us to do.
3. Stop resisting God’s love in our lives and start sharing God’s love.
4. Take the log out of our eye before taking the splinter out of another’s eye.
5. Take seriously God’s way of escape so we can resist deceptive temptations.
6. Thank God that He tells us the truth so we can start obeying the truth.
7. Ask God for the desire and power to respond in a way that pleases Him.
8. Ask God for humility in order to overcome the perilous problem of pride.
9. Refuse to sit on the throne of our hearts and instead enthrone Christ.
10. Die to our selfish interests so we may live for Christ who died for us.

We read in 2 Corinthians 5:15, “And he died for all, that those who live should no longer live for themselves but for him who died for them and was raised again.”
When you think about all that Christ has done, is this too much to ask?