

"GOD - I'M PROUD"

One afternoon Goethe and Beethoven chatted and strolled together in the valley. As they walked, passersby saluted, pointed them out, and bowed with ostentatious deference.

"Isn't it maddening?" exclaimed Goethe. "I simply can't escape this homage."

"Don't be too much distressed by it," said Beethoven. "It is just possible that some of it may be for me."

If this story is true, Goethe, the great German poet, was suffering from a rather advanced case of pride! None dare question the poetic ability of Goethe, this is an established fact. But in the presence of an equally great man -- Beethoven -- to assume that homage was to him alone was a mark of crass human pride. Beethoven did a masterful job of deflating Goethe's ego.

Pride afflicts many great men --and many not so great! It's easy for some to become wrapped up in their self-importance and think the world revolves around them. Other people, they believe are around only to reflect their self-perpetuated glory. Someone has wisely said that the man who is wrapped up in his own self-importance makes a very small package! One can have world acclaim but not be truly great because of pride. The larger a man becomes in his own eyes, the smaller he becomes as a person, because self importance works to obscure true greatness.

Is there anything that can be done to counter the problems of sickening pride? God has made it possible for us to deal with this problem. This should come as good news because pride is one of the ugliest of all human problems.

The dictionary says that pride is an over high opinion of one self it is exaggerated self esteem. Pride comes from the Greek word PHUSIOO Which means "to be puffed up, inflated" --- the idea of a bellows used by the blacksmith to blow air on the coals and keep the fire going. Pride is being filled with hot-air; being puffed up with the air or self-importance; having an inflated opinion of oneself.

Pride is like an egg --too full of themselves to hold anything else, or as someone said, "Pride is arrogant self-esteem."

Pride bears an unsavory reputation, but it also has a positive side. In the good sense, pride refers to dignity and self-respect. A person who doesn't possess the dignity of his own worth goes to the other extreme to false humility. Don't let the word pride rob you of your rightful dignity and self-respect.

But when a person becomes inflated with self importance, he imitates Lucifer (the Devil), the father of pride and lies. Lucifer was beautiful when created by God. He was given an honored place among the angels (Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28). He was placed over all the angels receiving and transmitting glory to God.

One day he wanted to grab some of the glory for himself. He thought "I will make myself like the Most High" (Isaiah 14:14). He rebelled against God in an effort to boost his own career ahead of what God intended. Pride began in the heart of the fallen one, Lucifer, and all manifestations of pride since have been fueled by the fires of hell.

Pride causes us to become impressed with our own abilities. Given enough rope, pride will eventually make us think we are capable of operating independently of God; it makes us feel self sufficient.

Pride falls into several different categories. We may succumb to the "pride of position", because of the job we hold. This is particularly true of many who have reached the place where they have a carpet on the floor and a title on the door!

"Pride of position" has a first cousin called "pride of organization." Churches are easy prey for this problem. Some put forth the confident assertion that "we are the BEST or THE ONLY TRUE ONE in the world." This is frequently used to foster esprit de corps among the members. However, these three words can be translated by one word -- pride.

It's an error of the highest degree to suggest everyone should attend their church because it's the "best" in town. Such claims show a basic ignorance of a church personality. No one church is the right church for everyone in town because churches have different emphases in their ministry that serve the particular needs of those in attendance. This doesn't make them all right either. Organizational pride originated in the pits of hell.

Another member of the family of pride is the "pride of possessions." Unconsciously people often rate themselves as part of a certain social strata because of what they own --- pride of living on the right side of the tracks, driving a prestige automobile, or belonging to the country club. People struggle to own things that outwardly inflate their egos. The more material possessions we own, the more we must be on guard against pride of possessions.

A fourth member of the family is called "pride of intellect." The modern world has gone berserk over knowledge and learning. A Bachelor's Degree is no longer sufficient to command a favored position in the job market. Now, one must have an M.A. or PH.D. In our age of dialogue, many Christians have become overly impressed with their degrees. Christians should strive to be as well educated as possible, but at the same time be on guard against the price of intellect.

The last child in the family is called, "pride of accomplishment," or as the apostle John calls it, "the pride of life" (I John 2:16). It's an ever present danger to view success as a result of our own personal efforts rather than the blessing of God. It is easy to be humble when faced with failure, but difficult to do so in the hour of triumph and success; it's easy to depend on God when we are at the bottom, and easier still to depend on ourselves when we are at the top.

When success arrives, the temptation is to tell God to go help someone else because we are now able to go it alone.

A farmer knows only certain kinds of plants grow in a certain type of soil at a certain altitude and a certain season of the year. Unfortunately, pride is hearty and thrives in any climate---in

any area of the world. Look closely and you'll find pride of position, possessions, intellect, or accomplishment growing all around you.

When you go to the doctor with a problem, one of the first things he wants to know is your symptoms. Once he knows them, he is on the track of finding the cause of your illness.

Pride, like a medical malady, has symptoms that are easily detected. One case study in pride is the church at Corinth; a cursory glance reveals several tell-tale signs of pride.

One symptom of pride is the development of cliques. Paul struck right in the middle of this clique-oriented church when he declared, "For you are still fleshly. For since there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men? For when one says, "I am of Paul, and another, "I am of Apollos ---(I Cor 3:3-4): " that in us you might learn not to exceed what is written, in order that no one of you might become arrogant in behalf of one against the other (I Cor. 4:6).

Pride results when we follow men rather than a ministry. The Corinthians were guilty of pride in their man which cause contention within the church. Someone said, "You can't raise turkeys and peacocks in the same area because both are stutters." when we begin to follow individual men, cliques develop within the church.

The tendency to gloss over sin is another symptom of pride. Gross immorality was prevalent in the church at Corinth, so gross it made the Gentiles blush. Instead of being grieved and taking action to root out the immorality, Paul said the Corinthians had become arrogant, and have not mourned instead, in order that the one who had done this deed might be removed from your midst" case of immorality was permitted to exist believers were too arrogant to deal with our ability to see things as they really

(I Cor. 5:2). A flagrant in the church because the this sin. Pride obscures are.

A third symptom of pride is a lack of concern for others. The Corinthians used their liberty in Christ with such an uncaring attitude that young believers were damaged.

"But take care lest this liberty of yours somehow become a stumbling block to the weak.

For if someone sees you who have knowledge dining in an idol's temple, will not his conscience, if he is weak, be strengthened to eat things sacrificed to idols?

For through your knowledge he who is weak is ruined, the brother for whose sake Christ died" (I Cor. 8:9-11).

A person filled with self-importance will demand his own way or rights, regardless of the effects on others. Pride makes it easy to rationalize one's own importance and make everyone else subservient to his wishes.

pride is deadly! It doesn't come into our lives with the force of a freight train. It doesn't come up and say "My name is pride. How about me sharing your life?" it slips in subtly and continues

to inflate the ego until it has a stranglehold. By the time its sinister presence is realized, pride may have delivered the coup de grace to your testimony and spiritual life.

The Word of God sets forth three basic principles which, if followed will deflate our balloon pride.

First: Be alert to the dangers of pride. When allowed to exist, Satan will use it to defeat us. "Prime goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling" (Proverbs 16:18).

Paul made it clear that a young convert should not be chosen for roles of leadership; maturity is a prerequisite for leadership. "And not a new convert, lest he become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil" (I Tim. 3:6). A young believer is more apt to become impressed with his own self-importance if elevated to a position of leadership. When this happens, it is a rerun of Satan's rebellion against God.

Failures of others are recorded in the Bible as divine objects lessons. Paul detailed some of the failings of the children of Israel (I Cor. 10) as object lessons on "how not to live."

When confronted by the bitter failures of someone else, we face a danger of letting pride put words in our mouth such as, "Isn't that awful --I would never have thought he would do that ---I would never do that!" Paul drives home an important point when he says, "Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall." (I Cor. 10:12) We walk along a narrow ledge and are just as apt to fall into the same sins as those we quickly condemn. The minute you think you are beyond the devils reach, the fall is just around the corner because pride makes you vulnerable.

Second: Be honest with yourself and God.

Take a good look at yourself in the light of God's Word, and you'll discover God has a different opinion of your capacities than yours. If you want an honest evaluation of what you are really like, read the Word of God (not your autobiography). The Bible doesn't give a touched up version of man; like a mirror, it tells it like it really is. Any man who sees himself as someone to be admired makes it evident he has not given much thought of God's evaluation of himself.

Paul gives an unvarnished treatment of the basic nature of all men in his epistle to the Romans. Listen to his description of us in Chapter three.

"There is none righteous, not even one. There is none who understands, there is none who seeks for God, all have turned aside, together they have become useless; there is none who does good, there is not even one. Their throat is an open grave, with their tongues they keep deceiving, the poison of asps is under their lips; whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness; their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their paths, and the path of peace have they not known. There is no fear of God before their eyes." (Romans 3:10-18)

Don't try to escape by saying Paul is describing the pagans in his day, as so many do this day. Go back and read the statement of universality like "NONE" and "ALL". Yes, God includes all of us in His description of what man is really like.

Incidentally, the Bible description of man is a good argument for the divine inspiration of Scripture. No man in his right mind would write a book containing such a universal condemnation of himself. Man wouldn't, but God did!

We can't bypass the effects of our "badness" by being super good. Some might try to circumvent the awfulness of their nature by doing loads of good deeds. Isaiah set God's stamp of disapproval on all our self-help projects: "For all of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous deeds are like a filthy garment ---" (Isa. 64:6).

Do you take rags used to wipe up grease and lay them up in the closet with your best linens? The filthy rags of our righteousness will never, and can never, be placed with or in God's "linen closet" of righteousness.

A word of caution. While being realistic about who we are we are to evaluate ourselves honestly. Even though we are not what we might think, we are somebody. He says, "For through the grace given to me, I say to every man among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith." (Romans 12:3)

This reminds us that we are somebody, not just a speck of dust in the totality of a vast universe.

Realizing we are somebody, we are to take an honest look at who we are in the sight of God. While we are not to over think (huperphroneo), we are not to under think either. We are to exercise sound judgment concerning ourselves. Sound judgment (saphroneo) means "to be in one's right mind." One man suggested Paul treats pride as a species of insanity. Failure to agree with the evaluation of yourself in the Word of God is pride.

The story is told of a young girl who confessed to the Catholic priest she had incurred the sin of vanity.

"What makes you think that?" he asked. "Because every morning when I look into the mirror," she replied, "I think how beautiful I am".

Never fear," said the priest, "that isn't a sin -- that's just a mistake."

Third: Be thankful to god for what you are. If you have attained anything, give the glory to God because it came from Him in the first place.

Thank God for your position as a gift from Him. In the famous passage on the vine and branches, Jesus declared, " for apart from ME you can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Promotions do not come from the employer, but from God. They are not based upon one's super ability, but upon His grace. When promoted, it is right and proper to acknowledge the role of the employer; but he is only fulfilling the decree of God.

Position in life is a grace gift from God. If you have been blessed with a high salaried job with prestige, great! Give God the credit for placing you where you are. If your job is one of lesser means, praise God who has placed you in the best position possible for you.

Our possessions likewise come from God. James makes this clear: "every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of light, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow: (James1:17). Possessions do not result from native abilities and shrewd planning, but from God's grace. Now it doesn't mean we are not to plan properly. It means we are receivers of God's gifts, not the originators. Since God gave them, we have no basis for an inflated opinion of ourselves based on our possessions.

wisdom is also God's gift (not our brainpower): "But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him" (James 1:5). God is the dispenser of wisdom to His creatures: "For who regards you as superior? and what do you have that you did not receive? But if you did receive it, why do you boast as if you had not received it?" (I Cor. 4:7). The differences between men is a result of the creative activity of God.

Face the facts. What we are and have are visible results of God's grace. Since we received these blessings from God, what right do we have to be puffed up with pride? None! Take some practical advice from the words of Paul: "But may it never be that I should boast, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world" (Gal. 6:14).

Spend time giving glory to God for His act of love at Calvary, and you will not have time to puff up your own ego. Rather, you will be drawn up short in worship of the Lord God. Self-glory is strangely out of place when you are giving glory to Christ ---the only one who deserves any glory.

If we aren't careful pride might sneak into our lives, and before we know it, we'll be puffed up with a bad case of self importance. If this should happen to you, you can deflate that ego if you will.

Following what God says you will find it easy to deal with the nasty problem of pride.

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