

Pride and Humility

When God first started getting my attention in my early 30s it was with the conviction of my sin. You've heard parts of this before. You see I was the "church lady". I was the superintendent of the Sunday School, I taught Junior High Sunday School, I was the leader of a girl scout troop, made soup for the soup kitchen, served at the homeless shelter, helped with the cub scouts, worked part-time (as a social worker, no less) and believed I was good at all of it.

When I first heard what I thought to be the "theory" that "all" were sinners and the very obvious implication that that included me I was horrified...not at my sin but at how dense my pastor must have been to teach such a thing with me sitting right there! It was new to me and I was not buying it. BUT, I had learned to pray and I was so outraged by the concept that I decided to ask God about it and I sort of challenged Him. My prayer went something like this, "Lord, if it's true that I'm a sinner, you will have to show me." Can you guess what He did? He showed me.

Talk about humbling! It seemed like every time I turned around for weeks He was showing me another sin. Thoughts, words, and deeds, I was covering all the sinful bases. It was a very hard reality for me to see myself in that new light.

Unfortunately for me the Pastor who preached that sermon stopped short of preaching about the solution to the problem so I went through a couple of years of trying to balance the scales between me and God. I worked even harder.

If you think about it even working for my salvation like that was an act of pride. My basic thinking was that I could out-manuever God. I could do more good than He

could find wrong! Eventually I learned the truth and got off of that merry go round but my point is that it's only seeing ourselves through humble eyes that even allows us to realize our need for a Savior. Not everyone is as proud as I was but most of the unsaved world really does think that their good works will outweigh their bad and they'll be in heaven. Our problem is that we compare ourselves to others – we can always come out looking pretty good if we compare ourselves to the right (or wrong) people. It's pride.

The themes of pride and humility are in the scripture starting with Eve wanting to be like God and we're reminded of them over and over especially in Proverbs where we're warned about pride seven times.

We're told to be humble and that God lifts up the humble. We're warned about the proud and told God will bring them low. We're to take off pride and put on humility (Colossians 3:12). We see time and again when God punished the proud for not humbling themselves before Him and blessed people for their humility.

It was interesting that as we talked about this at home Bing pointed out that we (I) have to be careful about judging someone else's pride. Someone who seems very proud to me may not be before God. We can mistake things like confidence and hope in the Lord as pride.

To be like Christ is to practice humility and to be proud is to be rebuked by Christ as the Pharisees were repeatedly. There is no getting away from these themes in scripture that we are clearly to become humble and receive God's blessing or we will be proud and suffer whatever judgment God will use to bring us low.

Pride is easiest for me to start with because it was and continues to be a real problem for me. I even wrestled with the idea about teaching on humility -- like I know

too much about it, like I get it and as if I need to teach it to you. Isn't that a pride problem?!

Well, God talks about pride at least 85 times in the Bible so I thought that I needed to look to Him to choose my topics. It seems pretty important. It is obviously a big deal to Him because He clearly tells us that He opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. That means that for me and for all of you, if we want God's grace and not His opposition we had better know what it is that He wants from us regarding pride and humility.

Certainly Christian maturity demands that we be able to humble ourselves before the Lord and each other.

The first time that God actually uses the word pride in the Bible is in Leviticus 26 when He was instructing Israel on the punishments for disobedience. It's clear that pride is disobedient and will lead to more disobedience. Please note that I said it's the first the word is used – not the first time we see pride.

We do have to be able to recognize pride in order to see it as a problem. That's what God did for me. He showed me my pride in my attitude about my sin.

Leviticus 26: 18 – 20, “And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.

God had been talking about specific punishments for not listening to Him and in that He says that He will break their pride. The conclusion I draw from that is that pride

will make us believe that we don't need God. At least we'll think that we don't have to listen to Him. BUT, He clearly says that He will punish us for that.

IN Exodus 10:3 Moses and Aaron go to Pharaoh who has been refusing to let Israel leave Egypt and they say to him, "Thus says the Lord, the God of the Hebrews, 'How long will you refuse to humble yourself before me? Let my people go so that they may serve Me.'"

So, again, Pharaoh's pride is refusing to listen to and obey God, rather he's deciding for himself how he'll handle the Israelites.

So also for us, when we know what God's word says but we refuse to obey. That's a pride problem. Think about how deep that might go. The Bible says we're to love our neighbor as ourselves (Matthew 19:19). How do you and I love our neighbors? If we don't love them is it because we in some way see ourselves as better than they are?

The Bible says that gossip and slander are sins. What do you and I do when someone gives us some juicy piece of information about someone? Isn't there pride in wanting others to think poorly of someone else or pride in having "forbidden" knowledge?

The Bible says that ladies are to respect their husbands and men are to love their wives. What does that look like in your house and my house?

The Bible says that we are to give to the poor and help those in need. As the economy worsens do you find yourself holding on to more and more of your own money? It's hard for me to look at a questionable future and think I can spare money now.

All of these things are pride problems. We believe that our way of doing things will work out better for us than God's way of doing them! We are the only one we're thinking about. Clearly, His ways are not our ways. In fact, they are higher than our ways but we don't really trust Him with that truth. That's pride. When we think more of ourselves and our own understanding of things than we do of God and His understanding, we have a pride problem.

Most Christians would never openly admit that they think more of themselves than they do of God but when we trust our own understanding above God's what else are we actually saying? We think our ways are better – that's pride.

We can go back to the book of Genesis and see that not only was Eve prideful in believing that she could be like God but after her it was evident in person after person. Cain was prideful in his offering. God gave him opportunity to correct his sin and rather than repent and make an acceptable offering he rebelled at the thought that he could be wrong (just like I did). He killed his brother rather than deal with his own sin! (I did not do that.)

When you feel that conviction of the Holy Spirit do you turn and repent or do you stuff the feelings and continue in sin? God is so good to us to point out our sin and we're so prideful to act as though we'd rather just stay in it!

Look at the tower of Babel. That was all about pride in their own abilities. They wanted to make a name for themselves failing to rely on the Lord. He punished the people for their pride. Abraham asking Sarah to lie about being his sister showed trust in his own plan and no trust in the Lord to protect him.

Sodom and Gomorrah. Ezekial says in chapter 16:49, Behold, this was the guilt of your sister Sodom: she and her daughters had pride, excess of food, and prosperous ease, but did not aid the poor and needy. Pride was Sodom's number one offense and it was characterized in not helping the poor and needy in spite of their prosperity. I don't know about you but that is very convicting to me.

Esau sold his birthright, Joseph told the dream to his brothers, Jacob's sons decide how to take revenge for the defiling of their sister Dinah (And we're not out of Genesis!).

On and on it goes. Pride is a problem the human race has faced from its fall shortly after creation. We all face it today.

The pride I'm talking about today is defined as "an unduly high opinion of oneself, haughtiness; arrogance". When I look back it's amazing to me that I never saw it. It's not something we tend to see in ourselves. Others see it clearly but often we're so proud we don't want to see it!

Let's go to Proverbs 8:12-13. "I, wisdom, dwell with prudence, and I find knowledge and discretion. The fear of the LORD is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. "

So, wisdom dwells with prudence and finds knowledge and discretion. BUT, wisdom also says that the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. The next part of the verse equates pride and arrogance with evil. If we fear the Lord we must hate pride as He does.

Proverbs 11:2 says, When pride comes, then comes disgrace. Proverbs 16:18 says, "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. Proverbs 21:4 says Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked are sin." Proverbs 21:24,

“Scoffer is the name of the arrogant, haughty man who acts with arrogant pride. 29:23 says, “One’s pride will bring him low”.

Look at the words that are used in relation to pride in the Proverbs - evil (Mark 7:21-23), disgrace, destruction, scoffer, low, and wicked. It doesn’t get any better when we go elsewhere in the scriptures. God relates things like pride and contempt, pride and violence, being trapped in pride. He talks about repaying pride, bringing down the proud, humbling the proud and even breaking pride.

We can’t read every verse about pride and humility in the Bible. We looked at few of them in the study questions so let me whip through the list of what evidence of pride God pointed out for us. Uzziah’s pride was that he was unfaithful to God (he entered the temple to burn incense when he shouldn’t have). Hezekiah said his pride kept him from returning a benefit done to him by God in sparing his life. He was so proud of his earthly good that he showed them off to other rulers and then he was attacked. Psalm 40 indicates that it’s proud not to trust in God. Psalm 123 says that the proud show contempt for others. Ecclesiastes compares being patient with being proud as though they are opposites so impatience is a pride problem. (Ecclesiastes 7:8). Isaiah seems to say that what man makes high and lofty (something we put above God) tends to be out of pride. He also talks of idle boasting being proud and associates wickedness and ruthlessness with pride (chapters 13 and 23). Repeatedly not listening and/or obeying God is related to pride (Exodus with Pharaoh and in Jeremiah 13:17). Ezekiel also seems to say that it’s pride that keeps those with plenty from helping those with little, just as with Sodom.

It can be so subtle and we rationalize these things so easily that we fail to see them as pride. Ask God to show you any way that pride is manifesting itself in your life.

When someone is habitually late for things that's a pride problem. They're acting as if what they have to do and their time are more important than the time of those who are waiting for them. When you refuse to admit you're wrong or apologize that's pride. How about spiritual pride? How do you act toward the unsaved in your workplace, school, or neighborhood? Do you see yourself as better because of your salvation? (You are not better but better off.) Gossip, slander, a critical tongue, greed, feeling slighted easily, unforgiveness, all of these have a root of pride. Pride (the selfish, arrogant pride that we're talking about today) is sin.

I can tell you from experience that when you ask God to reveal your own sin to you – He will. BUT, I think we've mentioned every week so far, if we confess it He is faithful to forgive us. But we must keep asking because it will creep back into areas of our lives that we least expect it to show up. At least for me, pride gives me plenty of opportunity to practice confession!

Well, pride is the sin and humility is what we're to replace it with. Biblically speaking humility is always good. Pride can be good as the pride Paul took in the Corinthians (2 Corinthians 7:4) but it is usually negative – even evil and defiling as Jesus defined it in Mark 7.

The dictionary definition of humility is “having or showing a consciousness of one's shortcomings; modest 2. lowly; unpretentious.

The Lord had to make me aware of my shortcomings – my sin – in order for me to bow to His authority in my life. I was not humble. In this sense humble is also a verb in

that God will humble us. He will bring us low and break our pride. Interestingly though, it's kind of like our faith, God offers humility but we have to accept the gift, being broken of pride is not a feeling or an emotion (though it may affect both) it's an act of our wills. It requires a choice – and not just a choice but repeated choices every time pride raises its ugly head, moment by moment we have to be willing to choose to agree with God about the condition of our hearts and minds. We have to be willing to look at ourselves as He does, not as other people do.

So, humility, which the Bible also refers to by using the word broken or crushed, is the shattering of the self-will. It requires the absolute surrender of my will to God's will, though this will not be fully accomplished here it needs to be our goal. Surrender includes our willingness to call sin what He calls sin, to see our hearts as He sees them.

James 4:8-10 **Draw near to God, and he will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners, and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be wretched and mourn and weep. Let your laughter be turned to mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you.**

Most of us would much rather be happy and comfortable than to mourn and weep. We want to feel better about ourselves, raise our self-esteem, and be raised up in the eyes of others. God says before you can get close to Him you have to find the path to becoming lowly. We want to lift ourselves up. God says you humble yourself and *I* will lift you up!

Look at Isaiah 57:15 **For thus says the One who is high and lifted up, who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: "I dwell in the high and holy place, and also**

with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit, to revive the spirit of the lowly, and to revive the heart of the contrite.

The beginning of this verse tells us that God lives in eternity – in a high and holy place. He is high and exalted. But, if we look at the second part of the verse we see that He also has a second residence and it's with “him who has a contrite and humble spirit.” So, from both of these verses (James and Isaiah) we see the one who is near to God is the one with a broken and contrite spirit – that is who God will rescue and deliver, who He will dwell with.

Psalm 51 is David's prayer after he had committed sin against Bathsheba and then against her husband. He understood that there was absolutely nothing that he could do to earn his way back into God's favor. In verse 16 he said, “For you do not desire sacrifice, or else I would give it; You do not delight in burnt offerings.” David was King. An offering would have been the simple route out. It's why we'd rather work our way to heaven than take a good hard look at our own hearts. We won't like what we see so it would be easier not to even look. David knew that God wasn't looking for religious works or a jumping through some spiritual hoop. The only offering God wanted was a humble, contrite heart. 51:17 says, The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit, A broken and a contrite heart - These oh God, you will not despise.

Jesus started the Sermon on the Mount, his first recorded sermon, with Blessed are the poor in spirit (Matthew 5:3). He was talking about how to have joy, to be happy. In order to do that you have to start with being poor. This was and still is a radically different way of thinking than the world then or now thinks. We don't think that any

kind of poverty is a good thing. Especially in Jesus day and to some extent now, many saw poverty as judgment from God.

In the Greek there are two words used for poor. One would be for a person who scrimps and saves but gets by, the other would indicate absolute destitution. Unless someone else helps them they will not survive. This second one is the word Jesus used here. If we don't come to the point of spiritual destitution where we understand that without God's intervention of grace and mercy we will not survive then we will not draw near to God. But, when we reach out to Him in our poverty of Spirit He'll respond with spiritual abundance in this life and the riches of His kingdom eternally.

So, what does it mean to have a broken and contrite spirit? Nancy Leigh DeMoss has a book on brokenness. She says that brokenness is a shattering of the self-will, the absolute surrender of my will to the will of God.

Contrite is a word that also speaks of brokenness. It implies something that's crushed into small particles or ground into powder. So what is it that God wants to crush in us? It's not our spirit or our heart, the thing that needs to be crushed is our self-will.

Think about a horse that a trainer is trying to break. It's not a physical breaking they want. They want to break the will of the horse. They want it to comply and submit to the rider. Isn't that what God wants of us? He wants us to submit to His teaching and comply with His will for us, so that the life and will of Christ is lived out through us.

So, the broken or humble person will be stripped of self-reliance and any independence from God. They will have no confidence in their own righteousness but will be totally dependent on God and His grace.

Broken can also indicate a softening or loosening like we do with soil. When we prepare spoil for planting we say that we break up the dirt. So, breaking loosens the soil of the heart, breaking clods of resistance that could keep the seed from taking root. A Christian with a broken and contrite heart not only hears the preaching of the Word of God but it penetrates, takes root because it meets no resistance. That Christian responds to the Word.

A contrite or broken heart that's soft could also be compared to soft clay. The hand of God easily molds it because it's pliable. Again, it's not resistant to whatever the circumstances are that God chooses to use to mold it.

One of the hardest things for us is that this humility is not just vertical. Certainly God sees us and knows our hearts but this is also to be horizontal in that we are to be open and transparent – honest and humble – with other people, too.

Let's quickly look at Saul and David, successive Kings of Israel. Saul was guilty, like most of us, of several infractions of the law of God. These sins cost him his position as King, his family, and in the end, his life.

When we compare his sin to David's we think that David has committed much greater offenses when he commits adultery because his eyes found a lady neighbor in a bathtub, and then he plotted to have her husband killed in battle. But, when the story of his life is told God calls him a "Man after God's own heart." (1 Samuel 13:14). What made the difference in the way God dealt with the two men and their sin?

When Saul was confronted with his sin he defended himself. He made excuses and blamed other people. He tried to cover up the sin and the consequences.

In 1 Samuel 15 when Samuel confronted Saul with his sin and told him that God had torn the kingdom from his hands listen to Saul's response. 1 Samuel 15:30, Saul replied, I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel."

Not, I am so sorry. Not, please have mercy on me o God. No, what does he say but, "I've sinned but please don't let anyone else know?!" He is much more concerned with his own reputation among the people than he is with being right with God. His response to Samuel, who was God's prophet, revealed a proud, unbroken heart.

Now, think about David. When he was confronted with his sin he was first of all willing to acknowledge the failure. He took personal responsibility for his wrongdoing. He confessed and repented of the sin. He repented to God but then he took it horizontal in two Psalms of contrition. He wrote both Psalm 32 and 51. In these Psalms he pours out his heart in true humility before countless future faithful people who would be able to read and learn from his failure.

Humble, broken people don't care who finds out about their sin, they have nothing to hide and nothing to lose. They want God to be honored.

When David was confronted with his sin he responded with a broken and humbled heart. This was the heart that God honored.

In a more general example think about Jesus and the Pharisees. We think of them as the bad guys but in their day they were the spiritual leaders, the pastors and elders with the respect of their people. They would have been the seminary graduates, the biblical scholars. Everyone looked up to them and no one would dare to question their spirituality or their authority. People would have thought they could never measure up to

their level of spiritual maturity (just ask them!). They were the closest people to God in the thoughts of the Jewish people.

Well, when Jesus came along they were stripped of this illusion. The Pharisees had very carefully lived before others so that their reputations were made by the keeping up of an external appearance of obedience to God when it was really a list of man made rules that they obeyed – or tried to. Jesus went deeper into their façade than anyone else would dare. He was God, He went for their hearts and revealed them for what they were. Over and over again Jesus revealed the proud, self-righteous attitudes and actions. He looked at and exposed the motives behind their actions. He made it known that God rejects this kind of hard, cold, proud heart!

In contrast to these Pharisees Jesus would point out lowly sinners. These were people that the Pharisees would have nothing to do with, in fact they had been rejected by almost everyone in their day. But they were repentant sinners with humble hearts toward God. These were then and still are the kind of hearts that God chooses to save, and to bless.

The most important thing that we can learn from this is that God is not nearly as concerned with the depth or extent of our sin as He is about our attitude and responses when we're confronted with it.

We all have some sin in our lives. It's the nature of who we are. But, we're also clearly taught that we're not to knowingly continue in sin (Romans 6:1).

Have you seen an area of pride in your life? Few of us are like the Pharisees who would pray, 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust,

adulterers, or even like this tax collector, Luke 18:11. But, that doesn't mean we don't think it or live like that's what we believe in the way we respond to other people.

As Christians we're quick to remind others what God hates, like divorce and idols and wickedness. But in the list of what God hates in Proverbs 6 haughty eyes are at the top of the list.

If God has shown you an area of pride in your life will you confess it? Will you and I ask Him to continue to show it to us so that we can truly turn from it? Words that are associated with humility in the Bible are salvation, gladness, grace, reward, honor, God's chosen, revive. It says that the Lord lifts up the humble, that He saves them, He hears the humble, He leads the humble. The real crowning verse may be Proverbs 22:4 that says, **The reward for humility and the fear of the Lord is riches and honor and life.** What could be better than the riches, the honor, and the life that God would choose for us when we repent of our pride and fear Him in humility?