

Pride—Its Manifestations

“Pride precedes destruction; an arrogant spirit appears before a fall.”
—***Proverbs 16:18,***
International Standard Version

PRIDE IS A POISONOUS manifestation of selfishness. It is, as someone has well said, “selfishness gone to seed.” Every Christian should be on the alert to resist the encroachment of pride, because to whatever extent

it is permitted to influence our thoughts and actions, it will blight our peace and joy in the Lord, and distort our every outlook in keeping with its own ugly form.

One manifestation of pride is undue regard for self. Paul warns “every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.” (Rom. 12:3) Self-esteem manifests itself in many and unsuspected ways. It may prevent one from accepting the Truth from a humble source. By the Truth we mean not only the doctrines relating to God’s plan, but the truth on all subjects related to our consecrated walk. It is easy for any of us to be wrong, even in the everyday matters of life, and

we should be willing to be corrected no matter from what source it may come.

If a person hesitates to seek advice for fear that it may reveal his own lack of knowledge, it is a sign of pride. In the world, the men and women who are most successful are those who seek the advice of others, especially in fields with which they are not too well informed. How much more is this applicable to the Christian life. Our understanding of the truth of God's Word is less likely to be complete if we are unwilling to examine and discuss these matters with others of like precious faith. That is the reason it is so essential that we meet together for mutual study and fellowship.

Undue contention in presenting our views may also be a manifestation of pride. The Truth stands on its own as a mighty bulwark of strength against error. We do not need to be contentious in its use. To be overly concerned about a point of detail may indicate that what we are presenting is partly our own view, rather than God's, and our pride is causing us to be contentious in its presentation. If such is the case, then pride will cause us to be very reluctant to change our opinion, even when it may be clearly shown to be in error.

This self-esteem manifestation of pride also may cause us to resent reproof, even though it may have been deserved and necessary. On the other hand, a Christian who is properly humble before the Lord and his brethren, will not resent reproof, even in cases when it may not be merited. Elders of the church should be especially on guard along this line, because pride may ruin their usefulness as servants of the brethren. If an elder resents having his

thoughts called into question by even the humblest member of the ecclesia, it is a sign of undue self-esteem, and he should take the matter to prayer immediately. This is true, even as the Apostle Paul has said, "In lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves."—Phil. 2:3

Elders are servants of the Heavenly Father's people, and it is not fitting for servants to resent questioning by those whom they serve. If there is any doubt in the mind of a brother or sister as to where one of their servants stands with respect to doctrine and practice, it behooves that servant to display the greatest of patience and painstaking care to make his position clear. A refusal to do this may represent a lack of humility before the Lord, and before the brethren.

Self-esteem may also manifest itself by the habit of interrupting others when they are talking. This may not always be the cause for such a practice—sometimes it might just be a case of nervousness. However, if we find ourselves constantly interrupting others in order that we may talk ourselves, it could easily be that inwardly we think that what we have to say is more important than what the other person is saying. Such would indicate undue self-esteem.

A willingness to listen to others is one of the evidences of humility, and is of prime importance to our growth in grace and knowledge. The lowliest saints of God, from the standpoint of human education and ability, may often express thoughts which are golden nuggets of truth. These may be more valuable, perhaps, than a whole discourse by one more talented. If we are not listening

when these thoughts are expressed, we lose them. Hence, we lose the blessings that would accrue from them.

If we are not humble enough to listen to our brethren, we could easily become proud enough not to listen to the Almighty One. God speaks to us through his Word. If we go to his Word merely to find that which will bolster an idea which we have developed in our own minds, it means that we are not truly listening to the Heavenly Father, but misusing his Word to satisfy the desires of our own self-esteem. Let us be on the alert to note the slightest manifestation of pride along this line, and in prayer before the Lord ask him to help us be free from it. As Peter has advised, “Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time.”—I Pet. 5:6

SOCIAL PRIDE

There is a danger that we may develop a tendency toward what might be called “spiritual class distinctions.” That is, we may wish to fellowship with only those whom we consider to be as “well developed” spiritually as we consider ourselves to be. Concern may even be expressed that newly interested brethren coming into the ecclesia may spoil our “deep fellowship.” This is to our shame, and is unlike the spirit manifested by the Master. If we feel that we are well-developed spiritually, let us rejoice in whatever privileges we may have of helping others to the same condition. If we do not rejoice in helping the weak, it is a very good sign that our own development is not as well-rounded as it should be.

While it is true that Jesus seemed to regard some of his apostles more affectionately than others, this does not mean that he did not love them all. He was glad for every opportunity he had of being with, and serving, all of them. In our truth association there will be those to whom we are drawn more than others, but this does not mean that we should ignore any of the brethren. Indeed, we should rejoice in every privilege we have of being with them and enjoying their fellowship. There should be no cliques among God's people. "All ye are brethren."—Matt. 23:8

APPROBATIVENESS

Approbativeness is defined as the desire for honor, approval, applause, and adulation, to such an extent that one strives to always be the center of attention, and tends to display a great sensitivity to both blame and praise. Clearly, it is an insidious danger to the child of God. Too great a desire to be well thought of by the brethren may manifest itself in various, and subtle, ways. One may hesitate to speak, read, or pray in meetings. To onlookers this may seem to be a display of humility. Yet, in some cases, it could be on account of fearing criticism if a mistake is made. For example, we might decide that it is better not to give a testimony than to give one which we believe would give the brethren the thought that we are not very good at giving testimonies. Pride, in a very subtle form, could be ruling our hearts in such a case.

We may have an inordinate desire to lead the brethren. The apostle says that one who desires the office of a bishop, or elder, "desireth a good work."

(I Tim. 3:1) To have a desire to bless others through the service of eldership is not, in itself, an evidence of pride. However, it does expose those desirous of serving in that capacity to the dangers of pride. We can check ourselves in this connection by noting our own attitude when others are speaking or leading meetings. Do we feel like staying away from meetings if we are not leading? Do we not pay attention when others are leading, thinking to ourselves that we could bring out the thoughts in a much better way than is being done? If we ponder such thoughts, let us beware—pride is gaining the ascendancy and, if encouraged, will cause our downfall.

Along this same line, pride will hinder us from rendering faithful service if we feel we should be foremost in ecclesia affairs. One who is truly humble will be just as happy to serve as a deacon as he is to serve as elder. Indeed, he will be happy to serve in every way possible even though the ecclesia does not seem to recognize his service, or confer any office upon him. We may get the idea that if we cannot be foremost in service along this line we are being neglected and ostracized. If we find ourselves feeling that way about the matter, let us beware.

From God's standpoint, the brother or sister who serves in a more obscure way, and who does not, therefore, receive the praise of the brethren, is just as faithful as those who are out at the forefront—perhaps even more so. Indeed, there is less danger that such service is rendered to win expressions of appreciation from fellow workers. Such are truly serving "as to the Lord." (Col. 3:23) If they continue "faithful in that which is least," surely rich blessings from God will ultimately be theirs. (Luke 16:10)

It is appropriate, then, that we show our appreciation for, and accord every encouragement to, all who serve, especially to those who serve humbly.

Another possible manifestation of pride is the disposition to talk too much about one's humility, as if our friends would not know we were humble unless we told them. Humility does not need to be advertised. Like the fragrance of a beautiful rose, its presence is manifested without the necessity of special attention being called to it. The rose does not need to say, "How sweet is my perfume!" nor does a truly humble Christian need to call attention to his humility.

If we discover that we are fearful that no one will recognize our humility, and feel that we have to call their attention to it, it is a sign that we have more approbateness than we thought. No one, of course, would actually say to others: "See how humble I am?" The fallen flesh finds more clever ways of showing feigned humility. An elder might open a discourse by saying that he did not understand why he was there, and begin degrading himself. If the brother truly felt that way about the matter, he would have most likely humbly declined such service in the first place. False humility, we trust, is rare among the consecrated, however the Scriptures remind us that the human heart is "deceitful" and "desperately wicked." (Jer. 17:9) True humility, on the other hand, will cause one to serve as well as possible in whatever position in God's providences he may find himself, without making apologies, excuses, or explanations.

Another habit which might represent the spirit of approbateness is that of constantly using

phrases such as “I said,” “I did,” and “I know.” Such phrases may give indication of a heart attitude we will do well to avoid. Habitually speaking of matters in this way may indicate a desire to let the brethren know that we are very smart, and in such high standing with God that our advice, service, or knowledge in spiritual matters should be highly esteemed. Here also, it is well to be on guard.

Another good test of humility is to note our attitude when others get credit which may properly belong to us. An interesting thought concerning some passage of Scripture may be under discussion. The thought may be based upon a suggestion that initially came from us. Do we “itch” to let the brethren know this, or are we happy simply in the knowledge that others are being blessed as a result of our study? Along this line it is well to scrutinize the motives of our every word and deed.

In our association with the brethren, opportunities constantly arise for rendering a little assistance here and there, by kind words and deeds. If, when we do these things, we look to see whether or not they were noticed, it means that a little bit of pride is still left in our hearts. “Playing to the gallery,” as the thought is expressed in today’s language, will never get us into the kingdom.

Along this line of seeking approval from our friends for what we do, is the test of what our attitude is when someone else is complimented, and we are ignored. Do we resent this, instead of rejoicing in it? This is a heart-searching test, yet by it we are able to measure our growth in humility and to determine whether or not we have reached the point where we are able to esteem others as

better than ourselves, and therefore glad to see them put forward.—Phil. 2:3

MORE OBSCURE EVIDENCES OF PRIDE

The habit of “foolish talking” and “jesting,” as mentioned by the Apostle Paul in Ephesians 5:4, is generally looked upon by the brethren as merely a waste of time. Yet, it could manifest a spirit of pride if one seeks to draw attention to himself through his ability to make the brethren laugh. In such an event, the motive back of the jesting would be much more detrimental to the brother than the jesting itself. A humorous play on words, if wholesome and harmless, may help to relieve nervous tension. However, if prompted by a desire for attention, it can do serious injury to any Christian indulging in it.

Just as one may refrain from giving a testimony for fear of making a mistake and having his pride injured, a Christian might also seek to give a very eloquent testimony in order to display his ability. Here again, pride would be displayed. To make sure that love, zeal, thankfulness, and sincerity are the motives that prompt us in speaking, it is well to ask ourselves questions. “Is it my desire to speak only to praise the Heavenly Father? Am I truly seeking to be clothed in humility? Am I depending wholly on the Lord’s strength to help me speak? Do I truly sense my own weakness?”

Pride may also be manifested in our characters by a reluctance to distribute the message of the kingdom, for fear our friends and neighbors might see us, and on account of it not think so well of us. Then again, does pride in any way hinder us from firmly, freely, and gladly acknowledging our belief

in God's plan, no matter who may ask us? Are we at times, perhaps, just a little ashamed of being a Bible student? Are we reluctant about being seen associating with God's people, or do we rather own them as our friends wherever and whenever we may be seen with them? In these ways, also, let us determine the degree to which pride may rule our hearts.

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Success in life, whether connected directly or indirectly with the Lord's service, provides a test of our humility. If we have, by God's grace, learned to do something well, we may be anxious to display our ability. If such an opportunity is not afforded us, we might become fretful, and assume someone is holding us back. If so, it is well to realize that it is probably God who is keeping hold of us until we have learned well the lesson of humility. If our ambitions or plans seem to be frustrated, let us not blame our brethren, but realize that no one can keep from us that which the Heavenly Father wishes us to enjoy.

When we maintain this proper viewpoint of our relationship to God, and of his watchcare over our highest spiritual interest, we will be greatly helped along the road to true humility. If our ambitions are checked we will search our hearts, and inquire of the Lord the reason, instead of blaming others, especially the brethren. At times, the brethren may be wrong in their dealings with us. If so, that is something with which God must deal. Of this we can be sure, that our position in the matter could only be possible through the Lord's permission. Our faith in his watchcare should enable us to believe

that he will permit nothing to happen in our lives but what will be for our highest spiritual welfare. In this let us rejoice.

The same viewpoint holds true when our brethren in Christ are not involved. In the business world, at our workplace, or in the office, we may seem to be held back from doing things which we aspire to do, and which we believe we have the ability to do. If this be the case, let us not blame our employer, supervisor, office manager, or fellow worker. Let us, rather, as in our association with our brethren, seek to ascertain what lessons the Lord may have for us in our experiences. If they accomplish nothing more than to keep us humble before God, they are very valuable, indeed. If, however, we become embittered toward those whom we imagine to be responsible, we have failed in this test.

Some of us may have imaginary accomplishments, and these cause more trouble than real accomplishments. Real accomplishments often represent years of patient toil in the school of Christ. Hence, the cost of attainment should be a counterbalance to keep the Christian humble who has thus attained. On the other hand, rapid, "overnight" attainment of ability, real or imagined, which is unaccompanied by development along other lines, is a truly great danger signal along the lines of pride. We should be on guard, not only against such a condition in ourselves, but also as we might see it in one of our brethren. Let us not encourage such pride in any way, thus making it harder to overcome. Paul said, "Let nothing be done through . . . vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things

[accomplishments], but every man also on the things [accomplishments] of others.”—Phil. 2:3,4

In all of what may seem to be our accomplishments, we should check the attitude of our hearts by carefully scrutinizing the motive of everything we say and do. This is true even when quoting Scripture. For example, it is always commendable to quote from the Bible in proof of what we believe. However, there is a possibility of quoting long passages of Scripture merely for the purpose of displaying our knowledge before others. Let us watch ourselves along this line, and be sure all we say and do is with the motive of glorifying the Lord, and not to flaunt self.

SPIRITUAL EXAMINATION

It is well to examine ourselves to discover what progress we have made in overcoming pride. Along this line, here are some questions for our prayerful consideration:

Are we truly glad to express approval of any grace of the Spirit we see manifested in others, feeling, at the same time, that we have not reached such a high attainment ourselves?

Are we always looking for superior qualities in others, and happy to acknowledge them when suitable opportunity offers?

Have we learned to measure ourselves, not by our own yardstick, but by the perfect standard, Christ Jesus?—II Cor. 10:12

Are we humble enough not to fear what others will think of our Christian character?

Are we glad to take a back seat while others are taking a leading part in God’s service?

Are we patient and gentle in defending the truth?

Do we rejoice when various doctrines of the Truth are repeated for the benefit of learners, even though we know them ourselves?

Are we able to enter wholeheartedly into the comments and prayers of others, even of the least talented, and not permit them to rankle us with the feeling that we could do so much better ourselves?

Have we developed to the point where we are not resting on the laurels of past service, but instead, are rejoicing in the golden opportunities of the present?

In this lesson on pride, Jesus is our pattern. He had all knowledge, all ability—earthly and heavenly—yet he said that his teachings were not his, but his Father's. He said that he could do nothing of himself, but only as the Father helped him. His words, Jesus claimed, were not his own, but the Father's. In view of this wonderful example of humility, how should we walk, who once were sinners, enemies of God, and without any spiritual knowledge, wisdom, or ability?

May we, indeed, remember that “before honour is humility.” (Prov. 15:33; 18:12) Let us also keep in mind the warning of our opening text—that “pride precedes destruction.” It is so displeasing to God that it is first on a list that includes murder, bearing false witness, lying, and other things which he hates. (Prov. 6:16-19) Let us, rather, endeavor to be clothed with humility and, being adorned with this and other graces of the Spirit, be truly “meet for the master's use.”—II Tim. 2:21 ■

*“By love serve one another.”
—Galatians 5:13*