

Spiritual Pride

*“Love vaunteth not
itself, is not
puffed up.”*

—I Corinthians 13:4,

Revised Version

THE ACT OF VAUNTING

oneself, or being puffed up, is unacceptable to God in all cases, but especially so with those who name the name of Christ. Such conduct is the evidence of pride, and pride is the by-product of cultivated selfishness. The selfish spirit anxiously seeks after all that it esteems as valuable and gratifying, such as wealth, fame, and distinction among men. To the extent that it is successful in attaining these, the tendency sometimes follows to feel complacent, independent, and superior to others. Among some, pride is cultivated until it enlarges itself to outlandish thoughts of imagined importance.

The proud do not realize how difficult it is for others to love them, or how really unworthy they are in the eyes of others. It is no wonder that the wise man declared: “Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.” (Prov. 16:18) This is true because the egotistical have overestimated their value and ability, and when they are weighed in the balances they are found to be sadly lacking a godly character.

The one who honestly and seriously estimates his worth usually comes much nearer the truth than

the one who over-esteems himself. When we stop to consider the matter soberly we realize that by nature we are all fallen and degraded by sin, and that even at our best we come short of perfection along every line. We really have nothing of which to boast. Thus when we compare ourselves with others, we must make a thoughtful and cautious estimation of our capabilities.

Pride is manifested in varying degrees, and usually those who are affected with this common malady do not realize it. The fact that one does not manifest a haughty look, nor an all-knowing spirit, does not mean that there is no pride dwelling within their heart. The absence of the extreme evidences of this trait is not sufficient grounds to believe that he is free from such an affliction.

Pride also demonstrates itself in different ways. One is by stubbornness, in which strong-willed individuals want their own way. Hurt feelings indicate that we want others to think well of us. The same is true of those who may be hypocritical or insincere. Boasting is an obvious form of pride which often involves possessions, knowledge, accomplishments, and the honor of men.

SPIRITUAL PRIDE AMONG CHRISTIANS

The pride which we often find in the world, based mostly on foolish thinking, takes a much more serious aspect when it is found among the Lord's consecrated people. Those of the world in general are not on trial at this present time, whereas the true people of God are. We are living during a "day of salvation" for the church, therefore, judgment is taking place with "the house of

God.”—II Cor. 6:2, *Rotherham Emphasized Bible*;
I Pet. 4:17

True Christians have no cause for pride or glory in themselves, for they have nothing that they did not receive. (I Cor. 4:7) All that they have, all that they are, and all that they hope for, comes from God. He has blessed and enriched his people. He has taken them “out of an horrible pit, out of the miry clay,” and has set their feet upon a rock, “and that Rock was Christ.” He has clothed them “with the garments of salvation,” and has covered them “with the robe of righteousness.”—Ps. 40:2; I Cor. 10:4; Isa. 61:10

The Apostle Paul said that God has “blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ.” (Eph. 1:3) How altogether unbecoming for any who have been so blessed and so benefited by the grace and favor of God, to endeavor to glorify themselves or to take pride in what they have or who they are. All the glory belongs to the Lord: “Let him that glorieth glory in this, that he understandeth and knoweth me, that I am the LORD which exercise lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness, in the earth: for in these things I delight, saith the LORD.”—Jer. 9:24

The Scriptures declare: “Be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.” (I Pet. 5:5) Hence, we can safely conclude that to the extent any of the footstep followers of the Master have pride, to that degree God and his Son Christ Jesus are resisting them, and to the same extent they are without the grace that otherwise would be their portion if they had the proper humility. What real progress can we make as Christians if God and Jesus were to resist us?

Jesus answered, saying, “Without me ye can do nothing.”—John 15:5

Without the Lord’s grace we surely cannot develop or bring forth any spiritual fruitage to maturity. Much less shall we be able to accomplish anything of enduring value if, because of secret or hidden pride in our hearts, the Heavenly Father is resisting us. If there is any vaunting of self, any swelling or puffing up, it is manifest that such a one is not made complete in love, for as our opening text says, “Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up.”

On the contrary, the Christian is exhorted to be “clothed with humility.” How very becoming is such attire, and how beautifully it adorns the faithful followers of Christ! Contrariwise, what poor and wretched apparel is the cloak or covering of pride! Not only is humility beautiful clothing for the saints, but it helps to cover the imperfections of their fallen humanity. Pride, however, is so undesirable that it hates to be known for what it really is, and so it often uses discretion to give it the same appearance as humility.

As Christians we should prepare our mind and heart to battle against pride in every form, however small or insignificant the symptoms may be. We should also learn to detect pride in whatever form it appears, whether as envy, evil-speaking, stubbornness, hurt feelings, self-assurance, a know-all attitude, aspiration or ambition, spitefulness, vanity, hypocrisy, a proud look, or even a proud tone of voice. We will be better prepared to slay this adversary when we learn to recognize it upon sight. Hence it would be most appropriate for us to look into the lives of those who were made examples to us in the Scriptures.

EXAMPLES IN SCRIPTURE

The first character that comes to mind when we think of pride is Lucifer. When first created he must have been extremely beautiful and bright, perhaps far excelling most other heavenly beings in his glory. Unfortunately, however, his beauty and brightness became a snare to him, for it is written, “Thine heart was lifted up because of thy beauty, thou hast corrupted thy wisdom by reason of thy brightness.” (Ezek. 28:17) We see in him the awful effects of pride and ambition. How it debased and defiled his character when he said in his heart, “I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God: I will sit also upon the mount of the congregation, in the sides of the north: I will ascend above the heights of the clouds; I will be like the most High.”—Isa. 14:13,14

Let us consider well the example of Lucifer and note carefully how pride of thought on his part paved the way for full corruption of his heart. Pride led to other sins, and ultimately to the complete debasement of his character. This brought him to the lowest depths of depravity, where he opposes the God of mercy to the utmost of his ability. Lucifer’s downfall should warn us to flee pride, despise it, and to loathe its slightest appearance.

There was a holy man of old, beloved of the Lord, self-sacrificing and “very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth.” (Num. 12:3) He served the Lord faithfully for forty years, but on one occasion was guilty of spiritual pride and self-assurance. It was Moses, who, throughout most of his career was meek and humble, but later was hindered from entering the

Promised Land because of a wrong act indicating pride.

On this occasion, the children of Israel thirsted in the wilderness, and cried to Moses for water. Moses was commanded to speak to the rock that it bring forth water. (Num. 20:2-9) Angered at the people, he said, "Must we fetch you water out of this rock?" Then, instead of speaking to the rock as he was commanded, Moses struck the rock twice. Because of this act of disobedience, Moses was disallowed from leading the Israelites into the land of Canaan.—vss. 10-12

The lesson to us lies in the fact that so meek and humble a character as Moses, even if only for a moment, was lifted up with pride and self-importance, and failed to obey the Lord before the people. We, too, could be deceived into magnifying our own importance as, through the years, the Lord has honored us with privileges of service, and in our case, we perhaps were less humble and meek to start with than was Moses. How very careful we must be, lest we begin to feel that we ought to share in the glory that belongs to God alone.

Previous to the foregoing experience, we notice the largeness and beauty of Moses' humility. On one occasion Joshua heard of two young men, Eldad and Medad, who were prophesying in the camp of Israel. He said, "My lord Moses, forbid them." To this Moses replied, "Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!" (Num. 11:27-29) If Moses had any pride in his heart, how easily he might have acted in harmony with Joshua's flawed counsel. The Lord's people everywhere should have a heart trained as Moses' was, free from pride

or envy. How thankful we are that Moses, in the totality of his long life of service, though not perfect, was found to be pleasing to God, and is cited by the Apostle Paul as one of the great Old Testament heroes of faith. (Heb. 11:23-29) Surely we can take comfort in this, knowing that we, too, fall short at times with regard to pride.

Another example of how the humble minded can often be lifted up with pride is found in Saul, the first king of Israel. When he was initially told that Israel desired to have him as their king, he said, "Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribes of Benjamin?" (I Sam. 9:21) Then, when Samuel desired to present him before the people and the Lord as the king of Israel, Saul could not be found for he was "hiding among the baggage." —I Sam. 10:21,22, *New Living Translation*

How quickly Saul seemed to forget his humble beginning, and began to feel that he was important enough to decide what part of God's commandments he should comply with, and what portion could be omitted. (See I Sam. 15:1-23) He no longer remembered that he was from the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin when the people cried out: "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." (I Sam. 18:7) The very thought of David, a lowly shepherd boy, being renowned as a greater warrior than he, was more than the proud and arrogant king could endure.

What had happened? Saul had forgotten his own insufficiency and insignificance, and that it was because God had been working through him that his efforts had been fruitful. Forgetting this, he was

willing that all the credit and glory should be his own. For this reason, Samuel was sent to remind him: “When thou wast little in thine own sight, wast thou not made the head of the tribes of Israel, and the LORD anointed thee king over Israel?”—I Sam. 15:17

We, too, as the Lord’s anointed people can easily forget our own unworthiness, and begin to strain our hearing for words of praise and commendation from our brethren or our fellowmen. The blessed work of proclaiming the glorious truth, and especially when this work prospers, can, in our minds, quickly turn itself into our own accomplishment. How important to remember, though, that any such success “is the LORD’S doing; it is marvellous in our eyes.”—Ps. 118:23

While they are humble-minded, and “condescend to things that are lowly,” the Lord often leads his people to higher positions in his service, or to some significant triumph in the Christian warfare. (Rom. 12:16, *RV*) At this point comes a severe test, in which the Lord’s people can easily be stumbled by pride. With their lips they may give glory to God for what he has done; but in their hearts they may be tempted to feel that at last their talents are appreciated.

We reflect upon another less prominent character of the Bible, one whose advice was greatly esteemed and appreciated by King David and his son Absalom. We are told that the “counsel of Ahithophel, which he counselled in those days, was as if a man had inquired at the oracle of God: so was all the counsel of Ahithophel both with David and with Absalom.”—II Sam. 16:23

Usually this counsel was well received and acted upon, but when Absalom rebelled against his father’s

rulership, and fought against him, he inquired of Ahithophel as to what would be the best procedure to gain the victory against his father. Ahithophel counseled him to give a command for the raising of an army that would pursue David and take him while he was weary and off-guard. However, Absalom called in another counsellor who thought that Ahithophel's counsel was not good and who advised a different course of procedure which appealed more to Absalom. By the Lord's overruling providence, Ahithophel's counsel was defeated.—II Sam. 17:1-22

The lesson of interest to us lies in the fact that Ahithophel, when he realized that his counsel had been rejected, found the pain of humiliation greater than his desire for life. He whose counsel had always been esteemed and appreciated was suddenly ignored, and his feelings were crushed. His pride and dignity could not stand such abuse, so we are informed that he “put his household in order, and hanged himself.”—vs. 23

QUESTIONS TO THINK UPON

From the foregoing examples we can learn lessons as we see how pride can dominate and rule the spirit of man. It is well to examine ourselves and to ask:

Do I fret and feel offense when my counsel and suggestions are ignored or set at naught?

Do I quickly challenge statements that underrate my abilities or impugn my goodness?

Do I feel great embarrassment when others, with less background, can answer questions that I cannot?

Do I feel indignant with those who may point out a fault of mine?

Do I encourage compliments and praise?

Do I hasten to put people “in their place?”

Do I shun reproof and hate instruction, especially when it comes from those I feel are less esteemed of the Lord’s people?

Do I belittle the deeds of others?

If our answers to some or all of these questions are in the affirmative there is need of significant improvement, for it would mean that there is a measure of pride in our hearts, which, if allowed to develop, could make shipwreck of our Christian lives.

Another example of one who was extremely proud and puffed up is found in the Book of Esther. That was Haman. He was one of the honored servants of the Medo-Persian king, Ahasuerus. Haman was promoted to a position of honor above the princes that were with him, so that all were commanded to bow before him. This gratified his ego in no small way. However, there was a certain man named Mordecai, who was a Jew and who would neither bow nor give reverence to Haman under any circumstance. Hence, Haman was filled with wrath and indignation against Mordecai and his kinsmen, the Jews. Haman had arranged with King Ahasuerus to have the Jews massacred on a given date, and planned further to have Mordecai hanged on a gallows which was specially made for this purpose.—Esther chapters 3-5

However, when Haman went to the king to arrange for Mordecai’s hanging, he was greeted with the question, “What shall be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour?” (Esther 6:6) In his vain imagination, Haman conceived the thought that surely the king was thinking of him.

Accordingly he suggested that the one whom the king delighted to honor should be arrayed with royal apparel and placed on the king's horse and delivered to the most noble of the princes to be proclaimed throughout the city as the one whom the king delighted to honor.—vss. 8,9

To Haman's chagrin and sorrow he learned that Mordecai was the one whom the king desired to honor, and, most painful of all, he was commissioned to the task of seeing that all he had suggested to the king be carried out in detail. Thus Haman was forced to lead Mordecai, whom he had clothed with the king's apparel and whom he had set upon the king's horse, throughout the city proclaiming, "Thus shall it be done unto the man whom the king delighteth to honour."—vs. 11

The pain of humiliation was crushing to Haman, for we are told that he "hasted to his house mourning, and having his head covered." (vs. 12) The very one he despised most was the one he had to glorify before the people, but it did not end there. As the matter developed, Queen Esther exposed the wickedness of Haman before the king, and, in turn, the king's wrath was not pacified until Haman was hanged on the gallows that he had built for Mordecai.—Esther 7:7-10

In this we see the results toward which pride leads, not that it always culminates in premature death, but that it ultimately leads to disappointment and to bitterness of soul. If this is so among the ungodly, how much more would it be true among the Lord's people. What a tremendous price to pay for self-gratification! The puffing-up of self is sure to incur divine displeasure, and hinder greatly our joy and rejoicing in the

Lord. It can be truly said that pride in no way enriches us, but leads to impoverishment of soul.

EXAMINING OUR HEARTS

Our hearts are the scale by which we weigh the various matters presented to our judgment to discern whether they are right or wrong. The scale can be very inexact, or it can be fine-tuned and well-balanced. The Christian, if he has been long in the school of Christ, should have a heart very sensitive to right and wrong, and, from the Word of God, should be able to draw the weights by which he would properly balance all the questions of life. Indulgence in spiritual pride would impair this scale, and would need to be rectified before further progress could be made in the narrow way.

To safeguard against spiritual pride and avert its corrupting influence on our characters require daily examination of ourselves. It behooves each of us to go to the Heavenly Father at the opening of each day and ask for divine wisdom and guidance, and then throughout the day endeavor to live in accordance with that prayer. Additionally, at the close of each day we should examine ourselves as to the things done and the words spoken throughout the day to see how nearly they were in accordance with our vows of consecration.

If we continue daily reckoning with the Lord our thoughts, words and actions, and if we do so with an honest, sincere, and properly guided heart, we may be sure that we will be keeping ourselves in the love of God. We will be growing in grace and in love, and there will be no “occasion of stumbling” in us.—I John 2:10 ■