Pride and the Worldly Spirit

"All that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."
—I John 2:16

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 encroachments 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.

SELF-ESTEEM

One of the manifestations of pride is that of undue self-esteem. Paul speaks of it as thinking "more highly" of one's self than is warranted—than one "ought to think." (Rom. 12:3) Self-esteem manifests itself in many, and unsuspecting, ways. It may prevent one from accepting the truth from a humble source, and by the truth we mean not only the doctrines relating to the Divine plan, but details of truth on any and all subjects. It is so easy

for any of us to be wrong, even in the everyday things of life, that we should be willing to be corrected no matter from what source the correction 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 the most successful are those who seek the advice of others, especially in fields with which they are not too well informed themselves. This is still more applicable in the Christian life. Our understanding of the Truth of God's Word is less likely to be complete if we are unwilling to take into consideration the viewpoints of 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 be a manifestation of pride. The Truth is such a bulwark of strength against error that we do not need to be contentious in its use. To be overly concerned about a point 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—that is, to admit that we are wrong even when the truth is apparent.

ELDERS' RESPONSIBILITIES

The self-esteem manifestation of pride also may cause us to resent or reject reproof, even though the reproof may have been deserved and necessary. On the other hand, a Christian who is properly humble before the Lord, and before his brethren,

will not resent reproof even though it may not be merited. Elders of ecclesias should be especially on guard along this line; for, unless they are, 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 in hand before he is slain by the monster.

Elders are servants of the Lord'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, or would-be 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 true humility before the Lord and before the brethren.

HUMILITY

A willingness to listen to others is one of the evidences of true humility, and is of prime importance to our own growth in grace and knowledge. The lowliest saints of God, from the standpoint of education and ability, may often express thoughts that are golden nuggets of Truth, 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 Lord. God speaks to us through

his Word. If we go to his Word merely to find that which will bolster up an idea that we have developed in our own minds, it means that we are not truly listening to the Lord, 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 to be free from it.

Social distinctions among the brethren are generally broken down, but the spirit of pride that was responsible for fastening the ungodlike theory of class distinctions upon the unhappy world is still liable to manifest itself among the brethren. We may, for example, find ourselves seeking the fellowship of only the better educated and talented among the brethren, and ignoring those whom we consider not to be of 'our kind.' If we find any such tendency to be influencing us, we may be sure that the grace of God has not yet taken as full control of our lives as it should. There is also danger that we may develop what might be called a spiritual class distinction complex. 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. Sometimes a fear is 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 in helping others to the same condition. If we do not rejoice in thus helping the weak, it is a very good sign that our own development is not as rounded out as it should be.

ALL YE ARE BRETHREN

While it is true that Jesus seemed to love some of his apostles more affectionately than others, this doesn't mean that he didn't love them all and was not glad for every opportunity he had of being with them all and serving them. In our Truth association there will be those to whom we are drawn more than to others, but this doesn't meant that we should ignore any of the brethren, and not 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

Another possible manifestation of pride is the disposition to talk too much about one's humility, as though the friends wouldn't know we were humble unless we told them. Humility doesn't 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.

SCRUTINIZING OUR MOTIVES

A good test of humility is to note our attitude when others get credit that 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 came from us. Do we desire to let the brethren know this; or are we happy simply in the knowledge that they are being blessed as a result of our efforts? Right along this line, it is well to scrutinize the motives of our every word and deed. In our association

with the brethren, opportunities are constantly arising 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 by the brethren, it means that a little bit of pride is still left in our hearts.

Along the line of seeking approval from the friends for what we do, is the other 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 in it we are able to measure our growth in humility, and determine whether or not we have reached the point where we are able to actually esteem others as being better than ourselves, and are therefore glad to see them put forward.—Phil. 2:3

ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Success in life, whether connected directly or indirectly with the Lord's service, proves a test to our humility. If we have, by God's grace, learned to do something well, how anxious are we to display our ability? Do we become fretful, and assume a persecuted attitude, when we imagine someone is holding us back? If so, it is well to realize that it is probably the Lord that is holding us back until we have learned well the lesson of humility. In all such matters it is important to remember that there are really no secondary causes so far as our relationship with the Lord is concerned. If our ambitions or plans are frustrated, let us not blame this brother or that sister, but realize that all the brethren could not keep from us that which the Lord wishes us to enjoy.

When we maintain this proper viewpoint of our relationship to the Lord, and of his watch care 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 for the reason why, instead of blaming the brethren and becoming embittered toward them. Perhaps the brethren may be wrong in their dealing with us. If so, that's something for the Lord to deal with. Of this we can be sure, that our own position in the matter could only be possible through the Lord's permission. Our faith in his watch care 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 even though our brethren in Christ may not be involved. In the business world, at our work in the factory or 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's not blame our competitor, our foreman, our office manager, or our fellow worker. Let us rather, as in our association with the brethren, seek to ascertain what lesson the Lord may have for us in our experiences. If they accomplish nothing more than to keep us humble before the Lord, they are very valuable indeed. But, if we become embittered toward those whom we imagine to be responsible, we have failed in the test.

Some of us may have imaginary accomplishments, and these cause more trouble than real accomplishments. Real accomplishments often represent years

of patient toil and trials and tests in the school of Christ, hence the cost of attainment is a counterbalance to keep the Christian humble. On the other hand, mushroomlike development of ability, even if it is a real ability, is frequently not accompanied by development along other lines; hence one in such a position needs to be especially on guard. If one's attainments are only imaginary, then the danger is truly great. Such a one may prove to be a great trial to many of the Lord's people. Seemingly, there is always someone to sponsor the cause of a brother who imagines he is being persecuted by the brethren, and thus his pride is further encouraged, and his overcoming made the harder.

GRACES OF THE SPIRIT

In this whole lesson of 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 honor, goes humility (Prov. 15:33; 18:12); before destruction is pride (Prov. 16:18,19); and that pride is so displeasing to God that it is classed with murder, bearing false witness, and with lying. (Prov. 6:16,17) Let us then 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 ■