

Proverbs
Pride: The Good, The Bad, & The Ugly

The AP headline this past week read: *America A Proud Nation*. “Americans are ranked first when it comes to national pride. A survey was taken of 34 democracies by National Opinion Research Centre at the University of Chicago.”

“People rated how proud they were of their countries in 10 areas. The US ranked highest overall and in five categories: pride in its democracy, political influence, economy, science and military.”

Pride can be a good thing. It can certainly unify a nation and make it stronger. But pride can be damaging too.

In 1863 Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States issued a Proclamation of a day of National Humiliation, Fasting and Prayer.

In it, this is what he said about our pride: “We have been the recipients of the choicest bounties of heaven; we have been preserved these many years in peace and prosperity; we have grown in numbers, wealth, and power as no other nation has ever grown. But we have forgotten God. We have forgotten the gracious hand which preserved us in peace and multiplied and enriched and strengthened us,

and we have vainly imagined, in the deceitfulness of our hearts, that all these blessings were produced by some superior wisdom and virtue of our own. Intoxicated with unbroken success, we have become too self-sufficient to feel the necessity of redeeming and preserving grace, too proud to pray to the God that made us.”

Pride can be a positive, or pride can be a negative. It all depends on where our pride is centered.

We’re in a series on the Old Testament book of Proverbs. The Hebrew word that’s translated “proverb” *mashal*, comes from a root verb that means “to represent” or “to compare.”

Proverbs are short statements of truth that often use analogies that are easy to understand. For instance Proverbs 15:17 says, *Better is a dinner of herbs where love is, Than a fattened calf with hatred.*

The book is a divine compilation of wise sayings, most of which come from the pen of Solomon the third king in Israel. Proverbs is a book that focuses on God. The Name Jehovah, the covenant name of the God of Israel is used 87 times in the 31 chapters of Proverbs. His truth is obviously the focal point.

God had told Solomon to ask for anything he wanted. Solomon asked for wisdom to rule the people and God answered his prayer.

Just to see this God-given wisdom in action I'd like us to start today in the **Book of I Kings, Chapter 3, Pg 303**

This is probably one of the best known examples of Solomon using his wisdom.

Read vs 16-28

Solomon was endowed with God's wisdom to rule Israel. Now, that makes the Book of Proverbs intensely practical for us today.

God's wisdom doesn't change. Cultural things change, which is why we always take cultural references into account when we're studying the Bible, but God's core truth principles don't change no matter what period of history we live in.

So far we've seen what Proverbs has to say about wisdom, about how we speak to each other, and God's view of sexuality.

Today we want to let Proverbs instruct us on pride.

During the monastic era the Catholic Church came up with a list of the 7 deadly sins. Number 1 on the list was pride.

Benjamin Franklin once said, "There is perhaps none of our natural passions so hard to subdue as pride. Beat it down, stifle it, mortify it as much as one pleases_it is still alive. Even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it I would probably be proud of my humility."

There is an obvious sense in which we recognize pride as being destructive.

Proverbs 16: 5 *Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD*

The Bible uses the words “pride” and “proud” just short of 100 times. Almost every one of those references to to pride in a negative sense.

So I want us to start there this morning with our first look at pride. This is the ugly side of pride.

Turn to Proverbs 16 Pg 573 Read vs 18-19

There’s a couple of different words translated “pride” or “proud” in Proverbs. The roots mean “to be lifted up,” “to be wide,” or “to be exalted.”

Sinful pride is an excessively high opinion of oneself; inordinate self-esteem: conceit.

In the biblical sense, pride is a belief that somehow we don’t really need God. Pride and faith don’t go together.

Pride is this assumption that we are somehow better than other people...that we’re more important than they are.

Pride can even make us think we are more important than God.

Hold your place in Proverbs and **turn to Isaiah 14 Pg 616**

This is in the middle of a passage about Babylon and it’s king but obviously it goes way beyond him and talks about things that would never apply to anyone on Earth.

This is about Lucifer, and a past judgement on him.

Read vs 12-15

You see the heart of Satan’s motivation there in that passage. Five times he says “I will.” “I’m going to be at the top. I’m going to be in control. I’m the most important one. I don’t need God.”

That's pride. I Timothy 3 lists the qualifications for an elder in a church. Verse 6 says, *not a novice, lest being puffed up with pride he fall into the same condemnation as the devil.*

Pride cased Lucifer to think he knew better than God.

How about Adam and Eve? Satan comes to them and promises, *You will be like God.* In prideful rebellion they plunged themselves and the generations to come into sin and death.

Sinful pride is deadly.

Now go back to Proverbs 16:18 *Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall.*

Proverbs 6:16 *These six things the LORD hates, Yes, seven are an abomination to Him: And the first one on the list? A proud look...*

Number one on the list of things God hates is pride. Why? Because pride is about self love and self exaltation instead of love for God. A proud person is all about themselves and their agenda, not God and His agenda.

A while back Discipleship Journal had an article about symptoms of pride. Let me just name a few they listed. See if you see yourself in any of these:

#1. They said if your proud you don't pray much. We don't actively rely on God because we proudly think "Man I can live life on my own. I don't need God's help." which leads to a second symptom:

#2. Weariness. The inevitable result of pridefully trying to do life our own is just getting exhausted by it all.

#3. Anger. Are you angry all the time? Anger is usually about wanting things our way. We're not trusting God's sovereign plan and timing so we get upset when things don't go OUR way and they never do when we ignore God's guidance.

#4. A Critical Spirit. Are you judgmental and critical of other people.? The act of

bringing other people down especially when we do this to lift ourselves up points to an inflated sense of self.

#5. Taking responsibility for success, accomplishment, or financial prosperity. "I did it myself. I'm a self made person. It's all about me."

When we start thinking that way it's a sure sign we've lost sight of God's gracious and undeserved provision.

#6. Impatience. Impatience about having to listen, wait, serve, be anonymous, or be led by someone else. This is all pride.

In his book, *The Life You've Always Wanted*, John Ortberg lists two other symptoms of pride that I think would help us in diagnosing this problem in our own lives.

One is vanity, or a preoccupation with our appearance or image. Did you know every one of us gets stuck on this one. You say, "Not me."

Yes you are. I can prove to you that you are preoccupied with yourself and your appearance. Here's how.

When there's a group photo and you're in it, who do you always look for first in the picture? Come on! You look for yourself, right?

And then we say, "I don't look good in that picture." Or "I don't photograph well." Let me clue you in on something. The camera's merely showing us what we really look like.

Max Lucado writes about this particular aspect of pride and says, "Suppose you are in a group photo and you see yourself. If you look good, do you like the picture? If you are the ONLY one who looks good, do you still like the picture? If some are cross-eyed and others have spinach in their teeth_but you still look good_do you like the picture?

If that's what makes you like it even more, you've got a bad case of pride."

The other symptom of pride Ortberg lists is stubbornness.

Look at Proverbs 12:1 15:5, 32

Stubbornness is a symptom of pride. It's pride that causes us to ignore correction. If someone points out some error or flaw, we evade or deny or blame someone else.

Do you find yourself being defensive even when good friends or parents or family members lovingly attempt to give you guidance? Do you find it difficult to admit when you're wrong?

If your answer is "Yes," then there's a good chance pride has you ensnared in its grip.

Listen to God's wisdom here:

Proverbs 3:11 My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction;

Proverbs 10:17 He who keeps instruction is in the way of life, But he who refuses correction goes astray.

Proverbs 13:18 Poverty and shame will come to him who disdains correction, But he who regards a rebuke will be honored.

Proverbs 15:10 Harsh discipline is for him who forsakes the way, And he who hates correction will die.

Proverbs 16:22 Understanding is a wellspring of life to him who has it. But the correction of fools is folly.

The fact is pride keeps us from getting needed help, doesn't it? If we have marriage problems and we won't talk to anyone about it, that's pride. When we've got financial problems and we don't want to admit it and ask for help, that's pride.

When we're not making it as parents, when we're not making it at work, and don't want anyone to know about it, that's pride and it keeps us from getting help and therefore growing.

As Mark Adams has written, "Pride makes us prefer to look smart more than to be smart."

No wonder God puts pride at the top of the list of things He hates. No wonder there's 96 verses on pride in the Bible.

The ugly side of pride is that it's antithetical to everything God stands for and values.

According to the Bible, we can't even have a relationship with God without humbling ourselves.

Fifty seven times in the Bible God is called the "Holy One." Holiness is talked about nearly 600 times.

The clear teaching of the Bible is that God is holy and we are not. God's holiness isn't relative. He's not like kind of holy. He's holy in every sense of the word.

Holiness means perfection. It means absolute goodness.

But then the Bible says this about us: *But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, So that He will not hear.*

The radical difference between us and God creates a real dilemma.

God in his holiness must punish sin. It's His very nature. At the same time God loves us.

Religions are man's responses to the recognition that something's not right. religions try to deal with the separation between us and God.

There's been thousands of religions down through history and lots of variations on the way back to God but in the end they all have one thing in common. All religions teach that there's something their followers can do to make themselves right with God.

In effect, all religions come up with ways for their followers to pay for their own sins.

The problem, of course, is we can't do it. We can try all we want but we can't be perfect. Some people might try a little harder than others. Some might try real hard.

But the Bible says the wages of sin is death. We need a substitute to die in our place. we need a substitute who has no sin of his own to die for.

That substitute is the focal point of the Bible, both old Testament and new. It's Jesus Christ. The Bible says, *He bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness...* I Peter 2:24

Because Jesus Christ was the sin offering, God can freely show His love to us. God can show His grace toward us.

Here's how we appropriate God's grace: Through Christ *we have access by faith into this grace in which we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.* Romans 5:2

Therefore it is of faith that it might be according to grace. Romans 4:16

The Bible says, *For by grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast.* Ephesians 2:8-9

Did you catch that? God says, "I forgive you through my grace, which is something you can't earn, salvation is a gift, therefore nobody brags in heaven."

Nobody says, "I was better than other people, that's why I'm here and they're not."

The first step to God's forgiveness is to recognize your a sinner and the second is to realize there's nothing you can do to earn God's forgiveness.

You know what stands in so many people's way? Pride.
I Peter 5:5 *God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble.*

Our relationship with the living God doesn't begin when we turn from our sins because we could never do that perfectly. It begins when we turn from pride and self-trust.

It begins when we humble ourselves before the mighty hand of God and say, *God, be merciful to me a sinner!*

Then we can say with the prophet Isaiah, *You have cast all my sins behind Your back.* Isaiah 38:17 and God will say, *I have blotted out, like a thick cloud, your transgressions, And like a cloud, your sins.* Isaiah 44:22

The ugly side of pride focuses on us and totally misses the truth of who God is and what He wants to do in our lives.

Pride goes before destruction. Pride keeps people on the path to hell.

The question is, how do we avoid the snares that pride sets? Or, how do we free ourselves if pride's already got us?

I want to suggest two basic principles we need to follow.

1. First to defeat pride we have to learn not to focus on ourselves.

Turn to Proverbs 20:6 Read

The New Yorker magazine ran a cartoon in which a smiling woman was jabbering nonstop to a glum-faced companion. The smiling woman finally said, "Well, that's enough about me. Now let's talk about you. What do YOU think about ME?"

Michael Angier, writes self-esteem books. In one article he says, "The dictionary says that esteem means, "to regard with respect; to prize, to appreciate. To recognize the quality, significance, or magnitude of, to admire greatly; to value."

"I know people who have too much confidence and self-pride, but I don't know ANYONE with too much self-esteem. Most people, in moments of profound honesty, will admit to a lack of self-esteem. They would like to feel better about themselves--more confident and capable--in short, to love themselves more."

"It would probably be fair to say that most social problems are the result-directly or indirectly--of someone's low self-concept."

I'm sure Mr. Angier's intentions are good, but what a twisting of reality. There's none of us that need to love ourselves more. We're already wrapped up in ourselves.

Never once does the Bible tell us to esteem ourselves more highly. In fact this is what it says, Romans 12:3 *For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.*

Jesus said, *You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.* Matthew 22:37-39

Jesus assumed we already love ourselves. That's why He didn't say "Learn to love yourself so you can love others." He said, "Love others as you already love yourself."

You say, "What about people who have no self confidence? What about people who are always down on themselves? Don't they need to love themselves more?"

Absolutely not. They need to stop loving themselves so much that they can't stop thinking about themselves and get busy loving God and others.

If we're going to deal with our pride then we need to get over ourselves and put God in His rightful place in our lives. That's not going to destroy us, it's going to free us.

If we just keep this passage in mind, we'll have a godly self image: *"The Lord is God. It is He Who has made us and not we ourselves. We are His people, the sheep of His pasture."* (Psalm 100:1-3)

Isaac Watts is known as the Father of English Hymnody. He wrote over 750 hymns in his lifetime.

He had a gift for rhyming which often got him in trouble with his strict father. Once he had to explain why he had his eyes open during prayer. He had been watching a mouse so he answered:

"A little mouse for want of stairs ran up a rope to say its prayers."

He was facing a big time spanking from his dad so he cried "O father, do some pity take and I will no more verses make."

Fortunately he didn't stick to that. He wrote hymns like Joy to the World, O God Our Help in Ages Past, and one of the most powerful of all, When I Survey The Wondrous Cross.

*When I survey the wondrous cross
On which the Prince of glory died,
My richest gain I count but loss,
And pour contempt on all my pride.*

*Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my God!
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood.*

*Were the whole realm of nature mine,
That were a present far too small;
Love so amazing, so divine,
Demands my soul, my life, my all.*

You want a healthy self-image get wrapped up in God and #2 Get wrapped up in others.

The opposite of pride is humility. Humility isn't weakness, cowardliness, ineptitude, or ineffectiveness. Humility is not seeing life as all about us.

Listen to these New Testament "one anothers" from the book of Romans:

Romans 12:10 *Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;*

Romans 12:16 *Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion.*

Romans 13:8 *love one another*

Romans 14:13 *let us not judge one another anymore*

Romans 15:5 *be like-minded toward one another*

Romans 15:7 *receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.*

Romans 15:14 *admonish one another*

Romans 16:16 *Greet one another*

You want to deal a death blow to pride? Serve other people. Really get into their lives. And don't do it because it makes you feel good, or because someone pats you on the back, or to get your name in the paper. Do it because you want to treat others the way God has treated you.

That's the ugly side to pride. Is there anything positive we can say about pride?

Turn to Galatians 6 Pg 1037 Read 1-5

Some people have really been puzzled at these verses. Do we carry one another's load or do we carry our own?

Here's what the Bible is saying: When we see someone else weighted down with anything that's too heavy to bear in life we should come along side them and help.

We shouldn't look down on someone else because they fell into some sin that hasn't tempted us. It would be easy to become proud of what we haven't done.

"I haven't sinned like that guy."

The Bible says be proud of what you have done. I like how NIV translates verse 4, *Each one should test his own actions. Then he can take pride in himself, without comparing himself to somebody else.*

'There's one burden which we can't share; and that's our responsibility to God.

Take pride in what you do for Him. Whether it's how you do your job, how you raise your kids, how you treat your spouse do it in a way that honors God. Do it in a way that is totally wrapped up in the wonder of God's goodness and grace that would send Christ to the cross for you.

A Jewish hater of Christians was converted to Christianity shortly after the death of Jesus. His name was Saul of Tarsus. He used to boast in his education, his knowledge, he even boasted in his family heritage.

But once he understood the marvel of God's grace to him he had a complete turn around.

He wrote these words. They should be the mantra of every one of us: *But God forbid that I should boast except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.*