

## “Your Greatest Enemy: Pride”\*\*

You’re awakened from a sound asleep at night. You try to gain your senses and discover the cause. Your dog is whining indicating she wants out. You glance at the clock and notice it says 3:30 a.m. You lay there just hoping either the dog stops whining OR your spouse takes care of the problem because you don’t want to get up. You need your sleep.

One afternoon someone offers a piece of constructive criticism to you. Nothing major, just a suggestion on how you could change the way you do a particular ministry that would make it better for the entire ministry team. You know the suggestion has merit, but your initial reaction is to be defensive, to give reasons why what you’ve been doing is just fine.

One morning at 7:00 a.m. your teenage daughter asks you for your help. “Would you scrape the frost off my car windows, dad, so I can see to drive to school.” Prior to her request, you’d already been thinking about the fact that your schedule that day is packed, so your initial thought is, “I’ve got better things to do with my time than scrape your windows.” And you justify that thought with a follow-up thought, “Plus, if I do it for you, you’ll never learn the valuable lesson about scraping frost off windows.” So after that thought process you say, “No, not today. You scrape your own windows.”

You’re driving down the road heading for an important ministry opportunity. You’re supposed to be there at 1:00, but as you glance at your watch, you’re wondering if you’re going to make it on time. The reason is right in front of you. There’s a car in your way and it’s going 45 mph in a 55 mph zone. You see a double yellow line that means you’re not going to be passing this sight-seer in the near future. You find yourself squeezing the steering wheel and mumbling, “What’s this guy think he’s doing? Doesn’t he realize I need him to get out of my way on my road?!”

Can you relate to any of the above scenarios? I must confess that these are not hypothetical situations. They really happened this week. And the reason I know they happened is because the subject in each is *me*.

There’s a common thread in each scenario. Do you know what it is? What is it that causes a man to think that his sleep is more important than his wife’s, that his time is more valuable than his daughter’s, that his ideas are so important that he resists constructive criticism, and that his car has more right to be on the road than somebody else’s? It’s one very simple, very common, very often excused, and yet very destructive entity. It’s called *pride*.

Who struggles with pride? To be honest, I’d never thought much about that question until recently. When I thought about pride I thought about the pro-athlete who complains that his 14 million dollar a year salary doesn’t do justice to his talent. “That guy struggles with pride,” I’d find myself thinking.

This past August I was asked to teach at a seminar in the Cincinnati area. During a free hour I attended a session taught by Brad Bigne, a pastor in Florence, KY. The subject intrigued me, “Practical Steps for Killing Pride and Putting on Humility.” I went thinking, “Maybe I’ll pick up some ideas that I can use to... *help other people*.” But God opened my eyes to a sobering reality. I struggle with the sin of pride. But pride is so subtle that I’d been missing it because I had such a narrow view of it. It’s not just the braggart who struggles with pride—bragging is just one manifestation of pride. Pride rears its ugly head all the time, but I’d failed to recognize it and in fact often excused it by redefining it.

Then I read two small books that God used to open my eyes further to the problem:

*From Pride to Humility*, by Stuart Scott

*Humility: True Greatness*, by C. J. Mahaney

As I began to see what God’s Word actually says about pride, I began to realize how dangerous this foe is. I also began to understand how most, if not all of our other problems—marriage problems, parenting problems, workplace problems, and so on—have at their root *this* fundamental problem, PRIDE.

C. J. Mahaney caught my attention on his very first page, “So let me make this clear at the outset: I’m a proud man pursuing humility by the grace of God. I don’t write as an authority on humility; I write as a fellow pilgrim walking with you on the path set for us by our humble Savior.”[\[2\]](#)

Why that statement gripped me so was because in the preface to the book I learned this about Mahaney. After 27 years of serving as senior pastor of a church, Mahaney, at the age of 51 and in the prime of his life and ministry, passed that role to a 30 year old young man that he had mentored and trained. That young pastor, Joshua Harris, shares:

“Most young pastors have to start their own church to get the chance to lead so soon, since few older men are willing to give up or share a position of leadership. C. J. was not only willing to make this transition but planned it for years so that I’d be positioned for success.”[\[3\]](#)

Now do see why Mahaney’s admission shocked me? If he says HE is a proud man pursuing humility, maybe I’d better take a closer look at what pride and humility really are.

I’ve been working on that and it’s been...*a humbling experience*. And a good one, too, for the Savior is pleased. And now I want us, as a congregation, to do it together, to pursue humility by the grace of God.

Beloved, I want to make a bold statement and then support it biblically.

*Pride is our greatest enemy.*

You say, “Can you support that?” I believe I can do so by using one verse. In fact, the content of this one verse appears in three different places in the Bible. It appears first in Proverbs 3:34 and is quoted in the New Testament in both 1 Peter 5:5 and in James 4:6. Here’s the statement:

**“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”**

According to that one biblical statement I can be guaranteed that three things are true if I am proud. In today’s study we’ll identify these three guarantees regarding *pride* and then we’ll search the rest of God’s Word to develop them. Next week we’ll focus on *humility*.

### I. Guarantee #1: If I am proud, God is against me.

Notice the first part of our statement: “*God opposes the proud.*”

The Greek verb for “oppose” is *antitassomai*. It means: “to be hostile toward, to battle against, to set oneself against, to resist.” It appears in Acts 18:6 which states, “But when the Jews **opposed** Paul and became abusive, he shook out his clothes in protest...” We see the same word in James 5:6, “You have condemned and murdered innocent men, who were not **opposing** you.”

It’s bad to have people oppose you, no doubt, but know this. If I am proud, *God* opposes me. God sets Himself against, He resists, He battles, He is against the proud. Pride is no small problem, my friend. Feel the weight of the following texts...

Proverbs 6:16-17 “There are six things **the LORD hates**, seven that are detestable to him: **haughty eyes**, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood...”

Proverbs 8:13 **I hate pride and arrogance**, evil behavior and perverse speech.

Proverbs 16:5 **The LORD detests all the proud of heart**. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.

God hates pride. In fact, the last verse indicates He detests even *the proud of heart*, those who hide pride in their hearts that no one else can even see.

You may wonder, “What is it about pride that makes it so offense to God?” The Bible answers that question for us very clearly. It also shows that if we’re going to deal with our pride we must understand it from two perspectives.

#### **A. Understand the root of pride.**

What is pride? The Greek word is *huperephanos* which means...

“to show yourself above others,” “with an overweening estimate of one’s means or merits, despising others or even treating them with contempt, haughty” (Strong’s)

That’s what Satan did in the beginning. He wasn’t satisfied with his created status as an angel. He wanted to *show himself above others*, above the other angels, above God Himself (Isa. 14:12-14). That’s how pride entered the universe.

What’s the root of pride for us? Jesus identified the root cause...

Mark 7:21-22 “From within, out of men’s hearts come... greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, **arrogance** [it’s the same Greek word translated “proud” in James 4:6, *huperephanos*] and folly.”

Pride is rooted in the human heart. We enter this world with an inherited pride problem. It started with Adam and Eve who placed their will above God’s and violated His command. Consequently, we too enter this world with hearts that are self-oriented and self-absorbed. Romans 1 describes the characteristics of depraved mankind in this way...

Romans 1:30 “...slanderers, God-haters, insolent, **arrogant** and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they

disobey their parents;

Note the three terms that go together here: **insolent** [Greek *hubristas*, violent; it's what Paul says he was prior to conversion in 1 Timothy 1:13, a "violent man"], **arrogant** [Greek word *huperephanos*], and **boastful** [from Greek *aladzon*]. These three traits present different facets of the one basic, root problem called pride. Here's the bottom line, the root problem:

1. *God created me to love Him and others.*
2. *When I am proud I focus on myself.*

Remember, this is God's world. He is the Creator, we are His creatures. R. C. Sproul said it well:

"The grand difference between a human being and a supreme being is precisely this. Apart from God I cannot exist. Apart from me God does exist." **R.C. Sproul**

But when I am proud I ignore my creature status. I act like this is my universe. It's my road, my time, my sleep that matters, my...my...my.

"Pride seeks to ungod God." Thomas Watson

That's a good way to think of pride. I am basically taking God's place. I am seeking to *ungod God*. C. J. Mahaney observes:

"Pride takes innumerable forms but has only one end: self-glorification." C. J. Mahaney

Pride is self-oriented. Pride does not think about God and others, but solely *self*. As Charles Bridges put it:

"Pride lifts up one's heart against God and *contends for supremacy* with Him." Charles Bridges in C. J. Mahaney

If we're going to deal with pride, here's where we must start. We must understand the root of pride. It's a heart problem, a self-focused orientation we possess from birth. A second perspective...

## B. Understand the fruit of pride.

Pride begins in the heart but it doesn't stay there. It manifests itself. How? Some ways are obvious. "I am the greatest!" boasted Mohamed Ali. In the following passage Paul identifies pride as a key mark of the end times...

2 Timothy 3:2 "People will be lovers of themselves [lit. "self-lovers," Greek *philautoi*], lovers of money [lit. "silver-lovers," Greek *philarguroi*], boastful [from Greek *aladzon*], **proud** [Greek word *huperephanos*], abusive, disobedient to their parents, ungrateful, unholy..."

Again, some manifestations of pride are easy to spot. The words "boastful" and "arrogant" identify two rather noticeable exhibitions of pride. But some are not so obvious and quite frankly, often excused. But they too characterize pride and if I am proud, no matter what the manifestation of it, I have God against me for God *opposes* the proud.

Let's identify some not so obvious fruits of pride. It's not easy to do for pride is blinding. "This fact is why it is often difficult to see pride in ourselves, and yet so easy to see it in others," as Stuart Scott remarks. Dr. Scott offers a helpful list to help us spot pride. From that list I've developed the following.

## I am proud when I...

### 1. Fail to be grateful (2 Chron. 32:25)

"This food stinks," says Johnny to his mother. "Why do I have to eat it?" A proud person, instead of being grateful, thinks he deserves better in life than what he has. That goes not only for food, but for cars, for jobs, for houses, and more. The complaint, "My company doesn't appreciate me," may be true but they may also be an indication of the pride notion, "I deserve a company that appreciates me." Proud people tend to be critical, complaining, and discontent.

### 2. Look down on others and show little tolerance for differences (Luke 7:36-50)

Remember the Pharisee who criticized Jesus in Luke 7? He got upset because Jesus allowed a woman with a sinful past to wash, kiss, and perfume His feet. He had a pride problem. He wrongly assumed that he deserved to be near Jesus but this woman didn't deserve the privilege.

Proud people look down on those who dress differently. They feel inward disgust when in the presence of someone from a different background. They have little tolerance for differences. How do you respond when you see a young person with dyed purple hair and a tongue ring? Whether he should have those isn't the issue right now (the purple hair and tongue ring could well be indications that this young person has a proud heart—he wants attention). But if I look down on him I have the same heart problem, pride.

### 3. See myself as being indispensable (1 Cor. 4:7).

Proud people often have a distorted view of themselves. "This ministry would fall apart if I wasn't around." Probably not. But regardless we would do well to read 1 Corinthians 4:7 often, "What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?"

4. Focus on my abilities OR on my lack of them (1 Cor. 12:14-25)

“Oh, I’m no good at that game. Just go ahead and play without me. I can’t contribute.” That may sound like a humble response at first, but it could actually be pride. Some proud people are always down on themselves. Their focus is on self. They rightly confess that they *can’t* do something but in their heart they *wish* they could and they *wish* they could have the recognition that would come from it. Having a “woe is me” attitude is self-pity, which is pride.

5. Have to be perfect (Matt. 23:24-28)

Often, people who strive for perfection do so for recognition. “I can’t invite a visitor from church over to my house. Why, my furniture is worn, and besides, I’m not a very good cook.” But is the purpose of hospitality to make people think well of us because we have nice furniture and show-and-tell meals? No, the purpose is to demonstrate biblical love by reaching out and focusing on others.

6. Talk too much (Prov. 10:19)

Proud people don’t tend to be good listeners because they think that what they have to say is more important than what anyone else has to say. And so they ramble on and on as though no one else was present. Proverbs 10:19 warns, “When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”

7. Am consumed with what others think (Gal. 1:10)

A person could be very quiet, not because they are considerate of others but because they don’t want to “say something stupid” that would cause others to think poorly of them. Is that pride? Yes, once again it’s a self-focused activity, in this case a self-focused *non-activity*.

The proud athlete is easy to spot, the one who brags and pumps his chest. But what about the proud *non-athlete*? That’s the person who didn’t even go out for the team, or who quit the team. And why? Because he didn’t want to mess up and look bad. That too is pride.

People-pleasing is an evidence of pride. So is making decisions based on what others think of you.

8. Resist or become angry when criticized (Prov. 13:1)

Proud people are defensive. Teens struggle with this. “What do you mean I’m being grouchy, Mom? I’m not grouchy! You’re just too sensitive!” Proverbs 13:1 states, “A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.”

But proud adults struggle with this too. When Pastor Darrel became our associate several years ago, he said to me, “I welcome your criticism. If I do something that could be done in a better way, please tell me.” That’s a mark of true humility, and that’s a mark that’s very rare. Proud people can’t bear the thought that they are not perfect and for sure don’t want anybody else pointing out growth areas, even if it is for their own good and the glory God.

## 9. Fail to be teachable (Prov. 19:20)

Proud people are know-it-alls. They respect no one. They need no one. They are superior.

## 10. Fail to show compassion (Matt. 5:7; 18:23-35)[\[4\]](#)

When Jesus saw a person in pain or need, His heart went out to that person and He took action. A proud person won't do that. They don't see the needs of others and if they do see them, they don't do anything about it because they're focused on their own concerns.

So there are ten manifestations of pride, but know this. There are dozens of others (Dr. Scott lists thirty!). The fruit of pride is abundant in this sin-cursed world and in these sinful hearts of ours.

“Okay, so there's a lot of pride. Should I be alarmed?” Yes! God's Word says, “God resists the proud.” If I am proud, God is against me. That's a guarantee. So is this...

## II. Guarantee #2: If I am proud, I will not receive grace.

James 4:6 continues, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” Note the implication. God gives grace to the humble ... *but not to the proud*. The proud forfeit God's grace. Allow me to identify some demonstrations of grace that proud people miss. Here are three...

### **A. Pride keeps people from salvation.**

Case in point, the rich young ruler in Mark 10:17-23. This young man came to Jesus with a question. Verse 17—“Good teacher,” he asked, “what must I do to inherit eternal life?” Notice his emphasis on *doing*. He wants to know what *he can do* to have eternal life.

Jesus told him to keep the commands of God. To which the man responded (20), “Teacher,” he declared, “all these I have kept since I was a boy.” This fellow doesn't see himself as a sinner. He sees himself as a basically pretty good guy. So Jesus told him to sell all his goods and then come and follow Him. At which point, verse 22 says, “...the man's face fell. He went away sad, because he had great wealth.” The man's self-sufficiency kept him from Jesus. He didn't need a Savior because he didn't see himself as a sinner. Simply put...

1. *To be saved you must admit you are helplessly lost. Yet...*

2. To admit lostness is something a proud person will not do.

Hell will be full of proud people, people who clung to their self-righteous rags and forfeited the grace that could have been theirs (Jonah 2:9).

Here's something else that pride (and the absence of grace) produces...

## **B. Pride produces frustration in the Christian life.**

Have you ever said, “God seems so distant. Why do I feel so far from Him?” The problem could be pride...

Psalm 138:6 “Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.”

Isn't that interesting? God looks upon the lowly, He is near to the humble. But there's a gap between Him and the proud. In Galatians 5 Paul identifies the works of the flesh. Note the list...

Galatians 5:19-21 “The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, **selfish ambition**, dissensions, factions and envy... I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God .”

Mixed in with what we call the “big sins” God's Word includes *selfish ambition*. People with selfish ambition do not produce the fruit of the Spirit. And people who lack the Spirit's fruit experience frustration in their walk with Christ. Again, God gives grace to the humble, *but only to the humble*.

## **C. Pride ruins families, churches, work places, and teams.**

God's Word is clear about this...

Proverbs 13:10 “**Pride** only breeds quarrels...”

Why do family members fight? Here's the reason at the root level. At least one party, if not several or all involved parties, have hearts filled with pride. Let's take another look at two texts we've already considered, this time noting the family implications...

Romans 1:30 “...slanderers, God-haters, insolent, **arrogant** and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they **disobey their parents**...”

Did you see the connection between the phrase “insolent, arrogant, and boastful” and “they disobey their parents”? We see the same connection in the following reference...

2 Timothy 3:2 “People will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, boastful, **proud**, abusive,



## disobedient to their parents...

Why is there often so much friction between parents and teens? It's pride. Because of pride, parents hold themselves up as the ultimate authority, "Do it because I said so!" (but parents *aren't* the ultimate authority, just the middle men in God's plan; God alone is the ultimate authority). Furthermore, because of pride, teens close their hearts to dad and mom, "You don't understand me." (which means, "I am so unique and special that you don't have the capacity to know what's best for me"—that too is pride).

Two things happen when I am proud and both are destructive.

1. *When I am proud, I think about pleasing myself. And...*
2. *When I am proud, I end up hurting you.*

It's not just families that pride destroys. Churches fragment as well. Remember the cliques in the Corinthian church? What caused them? Paul tells us in 1 Corinthians 4:6-7...

1 Corinthians 4:6-7 "... Then you will not take **pride** in one man over against another..."

But that's what the Corinthians had been doing, exhibiting pride by exalting in men. C. J. Mananey hits the nail on the head...

"Pride...undermines unity and can ultimately divide a church. Show me a church where there's division, where there's quarreling, and I'll show you a church where there's pride."[\[5\]](#) C. J. Mahaney

This is serious. Mike Renihan remarks:

"Pride ruins pastors and churches more than any other thing. It is more insidious in the church than radon in the home."[\[6\]](#) Mike Renihan

Beloved, we mustn't excuse our pride. It's a deadly foe that must be mortified. What happens if we don't deal with our pride?

Proverbs 16:18 "**Pride** goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

Some of you have seen the destructive effects of pride at your workplaces. Why is it so common to see management and labor at odds with each other? Why won't they talk with each other and work out solutions that are in the best interest of the company? It boils down to pride. "I'm right and you're wrong, and that's the end of the discussion."

If I am proud, God is against me—that's guarantee #1. If I am proud, I will not receive grace—that guarantee #2. We find a third in our text.

### III. Guarantee #3: If I am proud, I need to humble myself.

James 4:6 again, "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." All of us struggle with pride. What's the solution? We need to *humble ourselves*. We'll talk about how to do that next time. But for now, let's identify clearly what happens if we DON'T and if we DO.

#### **A. If I do not humble myself, God will do it for me.**

Proverbs 18:12 "Before his downfall a man's heart is **proud**, but humility comes before honor."

What leads to downfall? A heart that is proud does. Who brings about the downfall? God Himself does. Why? Isaiah tells us...

Isaiah 2:11-17 "The eyes of the **arrogant man will be humbled** and the **pride of men brought low**; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day. The LORD Almighty has a day in store for all the **proud and lofty**...The **arrogance of man will be brought low** and the **pride of men humbled**; the LORD alone will be exalted in that day..."

God hates pride. It's an affront to Him for this is His world. Jesus made the point very clear that there's no room for pride in His followers...

Matthew 23:11-12 "The greatest among you will be your servant. For **whoever exalts himself will be humbled**, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted." [also in Luke 14:11]

Beloved, pride will go. It's just a matter of time. If I do not humble myself, God will do it for me. Maybe in this life, for sure at the judgment. On the other hand...

#### **B. If I humble myself, God promises to help me.**

Hear His promise: "...He gives grace to the humble." *Grace*—unmerited favor and help. *He gives*—

it's not merited but His gracious gift. *To the humble*—we'll explore the full meaning of the Greek word *tapeinos* next time, but its basic sense means “to be low.”

Simply put, here's the promise. God helps those who admit they cannot help themselves.

Is it easy to get rid of pride? My friend, if you get serious about dealing with your pride, know this. You are in for a battle! The Puritan Richard Baxter explains:

“Pride is a deep-rooted and a self-preserving sin; and therefore is harder to be killed and rooted up than other sins. It hinders the discovery of itself...It will not allow the sinner to see his pride when he is reprov'd; neither will it allow him to confess it if he sees it; nor...to loathe himself and forsake it... Even when he recognizes all of the evidences of pride in others, he will not see it in himself...If you would go about to cure him of this or any other fault, you shall feel that you are handling a wasp or an adder; yet when he is spitting the venom of pride against the reprov'er, he does not perceive that he is proud; this venom is a part of his nature and therefore is not felt as harmful or poisonous...” --**Richard Baxter**

Baxter wrote those words in the 1600's but he's describing the plight of the 21<sup>st</sup> century man, isn't he? “If pride is such a vicious enemy, is there hope?” you ask. Yes, indeed! Peter gives us the battle strategy for dealing with pride...

1 Peter 5:6-7 “Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time. Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you.”

If you want to defeat pride, you must do what a proud man would never do. Admit your absolute dependence upon God! Humble yourself under His hand. Cast your care upon Him believing His promise that He cares for you. It's why He sent His Son into the world, to do for you what you cannot do for yourself. It's why Jesus died—to pay the penalty for the sin of your pride and of every other sin. It's why Jesus conquered the grave—to set you free from your pride and every other sin so that you could live for the glory of God and the good of others.

We'll learn more about the pursuit of humility next time, but it begins right here.

The Bottom Line: If you want to defeat pride, you must look to the 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.*

--Isaac Watts--

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\*\*Note: This is an unedited manuscript of a message preached at Wheelersburg Baptist Church . It is provided to prompt your continued reflection on the practical truths of the Word of God.

[2] C. J. Mahaney, *Humility*, p. 13.

[3] C. J. Mahaney, pp. 10-11.

[4] Adapted from list in *From Pride to Humility*, by Stuart Scott, pages 6-10.

[5] Quote taken from C. J. Mahaney, *Humility: True Greatness*, p. 34.

[6] Quote taken from C. J. Mahaney, *Humility: True Greatness*, p. 35.