

Symptoms of Pride
Proverbs 18:12

Richard Tow 5-10-15

For the last couple of weeks, we have been talking on the subject of humility. I feel the Lord would have me continue that theme today. Why all this talk about humility, because humility is the ticket to your future. There are some places in God that you can only enter if you bow low and walk in humility. Ps 138:6 *“Though the LORD is on high, Yet He regards the lowly; But the proud He knows from afar.”*¹ Nobody with a proud heart get close to God. God resists the proud;² He keeps the proud at a distance. Isa 57:15 *“For thus says the High and Lofty One Who inhabits eternity, whose name is Holy: ‘I dwell in the high and holy place, With him who has a contrite and humble spirit, To revive the spirit of the humble, And to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’”* The dwelling place of God is with people of a contrite and humble spirit. Where He dwells is where I want to be. Amen?

I went to California a couple of weeks ago on American Airlines. Before I was allowed to board the plane, I had to show them at the counter my ticket for the flight. The price had been paid before the flight. Nobody boarded the plane without a ticket. The place I want to go has a price and requires a ticket-- called humility. That’s why we have been on the subject these last three weeks.

Pride is something every human being has to deal with. It was pride that caused Lucifer to rebel against God. By pride the devil became the devil. Pride is the first and most foundational of all sins.³ Pride and envy were behind the religious rulers desire to crucify Jesus.⁴ Pride is the ugliest, most despicable, most defiling of all sin. And pride is a bigger problem is most peoples’ lives than they know.

Unfortunately when religious people try to deal with pride, they usually develop a superficial pseudo-humility that is far from the real thing. They try to be humble; they try to act humble; they may even be downright self-loathing—but the heart down deep is not changed. You find that out the moment you cross one of them. They’ll walk around looking at the ground, but you say something they don’t like and they’ll chew you up like a bulldog. The real condition of the heart is anything but humble. The Pharisees of Jesus’ day did all kinds of acts that on the surface appeared humble. They clothed themselves with sackcloth, bowed their heads in contrition, gave alms to the poor. But Jesus said it was all “to be seen of men.”⁵ It was a good show but when it came down to Jesus stepping on their territory, they crucified Him.

I’m saying all that to say, “That is not what we want to produce when we talk about humility.” We don’t just want to add a few religious mannerisms that appear contrite. What we want to do is cooperate with the conviction of the Holy Spirit and deal with those areas of pride that He points out in our lives. Especially these last few weeks, He is faithfully showing me areas of pride that I need to address. Most are very subtle, but down in the secret places of my heart the Holy Spirit is saying—don’t give place to that. That is pride and you need to put away that behavior. Last week we talked about four things God is telling His church to do (2Chron.

¹ All Scripture quotes are in New King James Version unless indicated otherwise.

² James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5.

³ Ezekiel 28:17 and Isaiah 14:12-15.

⁴ Mark 15:10.

⁵ Isaiah 58:3-7.

7:14): (1) Humble yourselves (2) Pray (3) Seek His face (4) Turn from your wicked ways. In response to that message, I've been asking God to show me how to humble myself. Friend, that is a prayer God will answer! The answer has been more than enough for me to handle.

To help you with that same process, I want to share a few symptoms of pride that will enhance your awareness of the problem—and maybe help you cooperate with the Holy Spirit as He leads all of us in a path of humility. Eight symptoms of pride:

1. Preoccupation with APPEARANCES

In 1 Samuel 15, King Saul had disobeyed the Lord and Samuel confronted him with God's displeasure. This should have been a point when Saul fell on his face before God, broken that he had displeased the Lord, repentant of his disobedience, concerned with only one thing—getting right with God. But listen to King Saul's words to Samuel in that context, 1 Sam 15:30 *"Then he said, (Saul to Samuel) 'I have sinned; yet honor me now, please, before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, that I may worship the LORD your God.'"* Saul is preoccupied with what this looks like to other people. For the great prophet, Samuel, to walk away from the king would clearly send a negative message to the elders and to all Israel. So Saul wants most of all to keep up appearances: "Samuel, honor me before the elders and the people, walk with me and go to worship with me so that everything looks ok." This was just one of many manifestations of pride in King Saul that caused him to lose the kingdom. Saul was more interested in looking right, than being right.

Question: How preoccupied are you with appearances? How worried are you about what other people think about you? What about physical appearances? Millions upon millions of dollars are spent each year for plastic surgery, Botox, cosmetics, and who knows what else to look a little better.⁶ I'm not saying we shouldn't take a bath, comb our hair, and look presentable. We do need to interact socially, and to not do those things would be a big distraction. I'm talking about the motives of the heart. Am I obsessed with my physical appearance? Does gaining a couple of pounds throw me into depression and self-rejection? If I'm invited to a formal event, I may wear a tuxedo, not because I need to stand out as the best dressed man in the place but because I want to accommodate the social wishes of my host. Why I'm doing it, is the issue at hand. Excessive preoccupation with my physical appearance can be an indication of pride in my heart. The same is true of my car, my home, my yard, etc.

What if God asked me to do something in a service that might make me look foolish? Would I obey the Holy Spirit? Is my spiritual hunger so strong that I would risk it just to make sure I obey the Lord and don't miss an opportunity He is giving me?

I think of the story of Zacchaeus. He had such a desire to see Jesus that he climbed up a tree in order to see him. I can imagine a couple of critics talked about this grown man making a fool of himself climbing up some tree. But pressing in at that level was richly rewarded. Jesus not only acknowledged him but went to his house. In fact, salvation came to that house that day because one man laid his pride aside and sought Jesus.⁷ One of the big hurdles I had to get over the night I got saved was the fear of looking foolish in front of a crowd when I walked forward to the altar. The first time God used me in the gift of tongues was in a church of about 700

⁶ The American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery reports approximately \$ 12 billion spent per year on cosmetic procedures. See <http://www.surgery.org/media/news-releases/the-american-society-for-aesthetic-plastic-surgery-reports-americans-spent-largest-amount-on-cosmetic-surgery> accessed 5-9-15.

⁷ Luke 19.

people. I didn't want to do it because I was afraid I might be embarrassed if something went wrong. On the other hand, I really really wanted to obey God. I'm glad the latter desire won out.

Are you willing to risk embarrassment to obey God? Or is that too big a price to pay?

Prov. 29:25 *"The fear of man brings a snare, but whoever trusts in the LORD shall be safe."* Anybody here ever been snared by the fear of man? I don't think we can enter into God's purposes if we cater to that fear. That fear is rooted in pride and it has to be pulled out by the roots. We're not going to do stupid things just to be stupid. There is nothing particularly spiritual about being weird. But there has to be a level of humility and hunger for God that says, "My embarrassment is far less important than God's will".

Have you ever been tempted to exaggerate an accomplishment just a little to make yourself look better in another person's eyes? Have you ever just mentioned an accomplishment in a conversation just to elevate their respect for you a little? I have and the Holy Spirit is faithful to say, "That's pride. That's something you need to work on." When the Holy Spirit convicts us of something like that, will we immediately repent and work on the problem?

Prov 27:2 *"Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; A stranger, and not your own lips."*

Prov 25:27 *"It is not good to eat much honey; So to seek one's own glory is not glory."*

Jesus confronted the Pharisees (John 5:44) for seeking and receiving honor from one another, rather than seeking the honor that comes from God alone. The issue is in seeking that honor. If we live honorable others will honor us, and we receive that appreciatively knowing that it is only possible by the grace of God. Honor will come your way if you live honorable. It's a false humility to not receive it. We simply receive it and turn to God and give Him the glory. But when we get motivated to receive praises and appreciation from people, we set ourselves up for problems. They don't always come through; they may not even know what we did. God may even be testing our hearts by withholding it.

We're talking about symptoms of pride, so that we can identify it and deal with it when it pops up in our lives. A second symptom is being:

2. Needy of ATTENTION

This motivates some people to jockey for position. They rush for the upper seat. Jesus said of the Pharisees (Matt. 23:6-7), *"They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.'"*

I personally think parents do their children a great disservice when they revolve everything around the kid's activities. Mom and Dad go from one event to another watching little Johnny do his thing. And the kid grows up thinking the world revolves around him. It's a big shock when he grows up and finds out that his peer thinks it all revolves around him. It may be the culture we live in; but I wonder how healthy it is for the child. Does he grow up with unrealistic expectations of the attention others will give him?

Prideful people speak up when they ought to be listening and learning. I discovered something interesting while teaching at Missouri State University. The mentality of students is different than when I was an undergraduate. We went to school to learn from people who were better informed than us. The culture has shifted. People to a large extent go to school to hear themselves say what they think they know. The result is a lot of ignorant conversations where

uninformed people tell other uninformed people what they think and nobody learns anything. Do I have the humility to listen and learn from somebody that knows an area better than I do? Or am I interrupting and giving my opinion before they can even finish a statement?

Do you have an excessive need for attention? Does it show up in excessive talk? The real test of all this is found in my response when I am not the center of attention. How do I react when I am not greeted, when I am overlooked by others? Pride gets upset. Humility is not disturbed by that.

Another symptom of pride is being:

3. Overly ARGUMENTATIVE

Can I respectfully discuss something without it becoming an argument? Do I have to win the argument when it ensues? Do I have an excessive regard for my own opinion? Watchman Nee said, “Many possess a stubborn spirit: they stick to their opinions even if they realize they are wrong.”⁸

That is one sign of pride. My opinion must be heard and I will defend it to the death. And I need to be seen as right. I was recently with a group of people who had a culture of challenging the details of anything anybody said. It was absolutely exhausting. You got where you measured your words very carefully, even on mundane subjects because you knew something is going to be challenged and then debated. I was just trying to have friendly conversation; but it got to where it wasn't worth the effort. Some things really don't matter that much. If they pronounce it “creek” instead of “creek”, I can live with the difference without a twenty minute discussion about which pronunciation is correct. I'm talking about opinionated and argumentative.

Do you have to have the last word in a debate?

How do you handle blame? If something goes wrong, do you have to fix blame just to make sure everybody knows it's not your fault? When confronted with a mistake you have made, do you have to defend your actions? Do you have an excuse or do you simply say, “My bad; I missed it on that one.”

Confident people, humble people can accept blame and move on because they have bigger fish to fry. Little people, prideful people have to make sure the blame goes somewhere else. How easy is it to draw you into an argument? Another symptom of pride:

4. Disrespect toward AUTHORITY

Rom. 13:7 says we are to give honor to whom honor is due. Before God can ever trust a person to be in authority, that person must first learn how to be under authority. That's relatively easy when the authority over you respects you and seeks your best interest. The real test comes when you get under an authority that doesn't have those qualities. Pride will excuse its own rebellion in those circumstances. Pride will criticize and talk behind the bosses' back. Peter addresses this subject in his epistle. 1 Peter 2:18-19 “*Servants, be submissive to your masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.*” In the next chapter (3:1) he writes, “*Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that*

⁸ Watchman Nee, Christian Quotes, http://christian-quotes.ochristian.com/christian-quotes_ochristian.cgi?find=Christian-quotes-by-Watchman+Nee-on-Humility accessed 5-9-15.

even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives.”

The point of both those directives is this. The fact that there are flaws in the authority over you, does not exempt you from having a submissive spirit. Pride doesn't even like the word "submissive." But there it is in the Bible. David found himself under the worst possible authority in King Saul. Saul lied to him, was trying to kill him, and ruined his reputation. David kept a respect for that place of authority through it all. And in doing that he was equipped to be the kind of king God wanted him to be.

Let me talk about that side for a moment. When you are in authority, how do you treat those under you? As a boss are you respectful toward employees and do you decide matters with their best interest in mind. Col 4:1 says, *“Masters, give your bondservants what is just and fair, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”*

How we handle authority on both sides of the issue, reveals how prideful or humble we really are. A humble person can afford to give honor to others because he has a good supply of it in own character. He does not feel diminished when he gives honor to others. Pride takes the credit; humility shares it abundantly.

This is Mother's Day and it might be appropriate to mention the honor God expects us to give to our parents. Modern psychology has turned the searchlight on mom and dad as the cause of every hang-up and misbehavior their adult children have. "It must have been because of the way your Dad treated you." Well, there can be some truth in all that. Certainly the primary caregivers in our early years help shape us in a significant way. But the emphasis is always on the negative aspects of that shaping. And I suspect that in some cases it undermines the respect that should be given to imperfect parents. The 5th commandment is that we would honor our father and mother. Some mothers deserve more honor than others. But we can give honor to a parent, even if it is nothing more than appreciating them for giving us life. Humility finds some way to appropriately honor other people. Pride excuses ourselves from the obligation.

The way I handle authority can reveal either pride or genuine humility. The fifth symptom of pride:

5. Selfish AMBITION

Phil. 2:3 *“Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself.”*

There is a godly ambition in which we are passionately pursuing the glory of God and seeking to serve Him in the best way we can. But Paul is speaking here of "selfish" ambition: power plays and the pursuit of my own glory. He sets that in direct contrast to the "lowliness of mind" that was exemplified by Jesus.

When this is in a church it works all kinds of havoc. When I am called in to mediate a church conflict, there are usually surface issues about style or doctrine or money or color of carpet, etc. But behind it all there is invariably power plays and selfish ambition. James wrote (4:1-2) *“Where do wars and fights come from among you? Do they not come from your desires for pleasure that war in your members? 2 You lust and do not have. You murder and covet and cannot obtain. You fight and war. Yet you do not have because you do not ask.”* People striving for things, striving with one another, but failing to ask—failing to come to God with their requests and trust Him to give them position, opportunity, money, or whatever it is they need.

Am I so preoccupied with my own goals, that I have no time to help others? My advancement is too important. I have to invest it all in myself. Preoccupation with self and personal pursuits can be a sign of pride.

Trying to connect with right people to climb the ladder can be a symptom of pride. I remember a trip to a pastor's convention years ago. Jeanie and I were driving down the road talking about how we dreaded the meeting because we got nothing out of it. God began to convict us of our pride. We realized that we had been doing something that a lot of the other pastors were doing: trying to connect with the big shots in the denomination. We repented of that and decided to seek out what people might view as the least couple there and pour ourselves into them. God arranged a connection and we invested ourselves in that couple. It totally transformed the experience. I can't remember who they were; it was simply giving ourselves to them during that time.

Prov 16:18-19 *"Pride goes before destruction, And a haughty spirit before a fall. 19 Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, Than to divide the spoil with the proud."*

Are you willing to give yourself to someone who needs you rather than seeking out somebody that might help your advancement? Are their goals and pursuits as important as yours? Another symptom of pride is being:

6. Unwilling to ACCOMMODATE others.

Do we have to go to the restaurant you? Can I pick the movie this time since you picked it last time? Some people complain about not having friends; but people don't want to be with them because they are prideful. It's hard to be with prideful people. They're easily offended. They seldom, in the final analysis, accommodate the wishes of others.

Are you easy to be with? Are you respectful of other people's time?

One subtle symptom of pride is habitual tardiness. Showing up late for an appointment is saying my time is more important than your time; you can wait on me. Now sometimes something comes up and we have to be late. I'm not talking about that; I'm talking about being late habitually.

Bottom line: humility is respectful and considerate of others; pride is lacking in those qualities.

Can I compromise on differences? There are some values that can't be compromised. Even with those issues there are ways to respectfully disagree. But most differences can be worked out if both parties will operate in humility. When Rehoboam became king, he was asked by the leaders to give people some relief on the taxes. His father, Solomon, had imposed some heavy taxes on them and they were asking that he would lighten up on that. Instead of working out a solution to their request, he answered them pridefully, saying to them that his little finger would be thicker than his father's loins. The result of that prideful response was a rebellion that split the nation of Israel into two kingdoms.⁹

Symptom number:

7. Inappropriate ANGER

How do we respond when somebody crosses us? Only by pride comes contention. The Bible says that Moses was the most humble man on earth in Numbers 12. In that chapter his sister

⁹ 1Kings 12 and 2Chronicles 10.

Miriam and his brother Aaron began to talk against him. They focused on criticizing his marriage; but they were simply rebelling against his authority. His response is an amazing example of humility. In judgment on Miriam, God struck her with leprosy. Instead of defending himself in any way, Moses sought the Lord for her healing and got it. When people talk about me, when people oppose me, is that my response?

Prov. 19:11 *“The discretion of a man makes him slow to anger, And his glory is to overlook a transgression.”* Can I simply overlook a transgression? How easily am I offended? If I am often offended at people, I may have a pride problem, even if I have a superficial demeanor of humility.

Eccl 7:8-9 *“The end of a thing is better than its beginning; The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit. 9 Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.”*

If I don't think too highly of myself, when people tell me I'm not all that—I already know it and am not upset by the news. Symptom 8:

8. Stubborn ADDICTIONS

Most additions have their roots somewhere in pride. One of the goals of the 12 step program is to help us see the problem at a deep enough level to deal with it effectively. If I am prideful and that pride is threatened, then I am anxious. The anxiety causes me to seek comfort and I may find it in a variety of ways. On the surface it just looks like I've got a drinking problem or a drug problem. But when I dig deeper, I may dig into some pride along the way. As I work the 12 steps I am addressing pride during the journey. It confronts my pride to take an honest personal inventory. It confronts my pride to acknowledge that my life is unmanageable. It confronts my pride to go and make amends to people I have wronged. One reason the 12 step program has been effective over the years is that it doesn't just chop off surface branches. It seeks to identify and address the root of the matter.

Page 73 of Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions says, “So it is that we first see humility as a necessity. But this is the barest beginning. To get completely away from our aversion to the idea of being humble, to gain a vision of humility as the avenue to true freedom of the human spirit, to be willing to work for humility as something to be desired for itself, takes most of us a long, long time. A whole life-time geared to self-centeredness cannot be set in reverse all at once.”¹⁰

Prior to that statement, the author talked about the process of learning humility as something more than a condition of groveling despair. We have to understand that self-loathing and humility are two very different things. Sometimes when people have low self-esteem, they interpret that as humility and therefore don't even consider pride as the possible root. But self-loathing and self-absorption are not far from one another. And pride is always self-centered. An excessive focus on self may be a symptom of pride. A stubborn addiction may be a symptom of pride.

CONCLUSION

¹⁰ *Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions*, 40th Printing (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 1988) p. 73. (The first two sentences of the quote are referring to the admission of powerlessness in step one).

I have mention eight possible symptoms of pride.

1. Preoccupation with APPEARANCES
2. Needy of ATTENTION
3. ARGUMENTATIVE
4. Disrespectful toward AUTHORITY
5. Selfish AMBITION
6. Unwilling to ACCOMMODATE
7. Inappropriate ANGER
8. Stubborn ADDICTIONS.

I have shared these symptoms so that we can recognize pride in our own lives when it raises its ugly head. That's when we humble ourselves and ask God to help us overcome those specific tendencies. If you couldn't identify with any of those symptoms, you're either the most humble person here or the most prideful. I shared them because I can identify with all eight.

I believe the Lord wants to pour out His Spirit on us and do some pretty awesome things. But the one thing that blocks that in most situations is pride. The American Church is far more prideful than she realizes. You and I are probably more prideful than we realize. Prov. 18:12 says, "*Before destruction the heart of a man is haughty, And before honor is humility.*" If there is anything I can do to position myself to enjoy the honor of being used by God in these last days, I want to do it. I think humbling ourselves before God is a good start.

Pray

Lord, in Proverbs 6 You identify things You hate. And the first one listed is a proud look. I choose to hate that which you hate and I declare war on my own pride. I ask you to show me when I am behaving pridefully and help me to overcome that iniquity. Help me to humble myself before you and in my relations with others. Lord, position us for great things. Prepare us so that great things don't invoke pride in our hearts. We will honor and glorify you as you do these things. Amen.