

Ministerial Pride

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PRIDE IS A MOTHER SIN. All sin, in a way, is a manifestation of pride. That is, the conceit, the arrogance, the self-importance – pride affects every word, thought and deed. Pride, though subtle, is fairly simple – "thinking more highly of ourselves than we ought to think."¹

THIS SELF-EXALTATION IS UNIVERSAL, infecting every heart,² until the time when one is born again and the proud man is taken down to full surrender by the finger of God.³ Right there is the crux of conversion to Christ. It was a pride problem; it was a power struggle between man and God. Remember Nebuchadnezzar. Thankfully, "God is *able to humble* those who walk in *pride*," as he himself then confesses.⁴ But then, as the saying goes, "Pride is the last thing to go before conversion to Christ, and then it is the first to try to return."

BUT PRIDE IN THE PREACHER? Of all those who surround the Lord Jesus, you would expect humility in the pastor. Just as certain weeds grow best in certain soils, so pride grows perhaps most easily in the heart of a Christian minister. Surely the pastor could afford to stay low. He has been honored by God.⁵ What's the problem? First, *unbelief and subtle insecurity* cause him to promote himself. He is *afraid* someone else will get the credit and the honor and threaten his position. But the Christian minister ought to ask himself, "Has God put me here or not?" If so, he can afford to take the low position, for he is secure with God. Second, ministerial pride is so *easily hidden under the cloak of 'doing service for the Lord.'* Often the pastor does the praying, the preaching, and he leads the singing, too. "After all," he thinks, "who does those things better than the pastor?" And, "That's what I'm being paid for." Thus, we have a one-man show by a professional religious worker, while the rest of the body of Christ are left sitting in silence, unexercised, unused, and unscriptural.⁶ Third, *the pastor is the counselor*, the teacher, the one who is sought out for wisdom. It is highly tempting for the pastor to think he's pretty smart. But lo, knowledge puffs up, "it makes arrogant,"⁷ ever so easily. Pride over wisdom is perhaps the most disgusting. God catches the clever in the craftiness.⁸ Thus, we have this admonition, "Who

1 Romans 12:3

2 Mark 7:22

3 Luke 9:23, Acts 22:10

4 Daniel 4:37

5 1 Thessalonians 5:13

6 1 Corinthians 14:26

7 1 Corinthians 8:1f

8 1 Corinthians 1:19; 3:19

among you is wise and understanding? Let him show by his good behavior his deeds in the gentleness of wisdom."⁹ I myself tremble while writing this article.

PRIDE IS A DECEIVER. "The arrogance of your heart has *deceived* you."¹⁰ Pride derails sound judgment.¹¹ It will get a minister to make foolish choices, lead a church astray, side-step the truth, compromise, and deny sound doctrine and the whole counsel of God in order to protect himself and his 'following'.¹² It will make a coward out of him. What is said of immorality, could be said of pride, "For many are the victims she has cast down, and numerous are all her slain."¹³

PRIDE MUST BE FOUGHT AGAINST, FOR IT WILL DESTROY A PREACHER SOONER than anything. It "goes before destruction".¹⁴ The Bible is replete with examples and effects of ministerial pride. Personal experience is replete – men who started well, but became proud of their gifting, proud of their success, and, promoting themselves and their slightly "strange doctrines,"¹⁵ they then become fairly useless in the kingdom.

PRIDE TOOK LUCIFER DOWN.¹⁶ He was proud of his gifts, position, and appointment. He wanted yet more power. "I will ascend," he says. But God says, "Nevertheless you will be thrust down."

THE CANDIDATE FOR A PASTOR CANNOT BE A NEW CONVERT.¹⁷ Why? He is liable to do the same thing that Lucifer did, that is, he will "become conceited and fall into the condemnation incurred by the devil." Why? A new convert is not adequately self-suspecting. He has not had enough failure, grief, and self-disappointments. He has not seen enough of the subtleties and treacheries of pride.

9 James 3:13

10 Obadiah 3

11 John 5:30

12 Acts 20:30

13 Proverbs 7:26

14 Proverbs 16:18; 11:2; 18:12; 29:23

15 1 Timothy 1:3

16 Isaiah 14:12ff; Ezekiel 28:12ff

17 1 Timothy 3:6

GOOD KING HEZEKIAH WAS CAUGHT BY PRIDE. "Hezekiah gave no return for the benefit he received, because his heart was *proud*."¹⁸ The divine biography says he later "humbled the *pride* of his heart" and God's wrath was postponed.¹⁹

GOOD KING UZZIAH WAS CAUGHT BY PRIDE. His success led to his failure. The resulting action? He did not keep his own place and he did someone else's work. "When he became strong, his heart was *so proud* that he acted corruptly, and he was unfaithful to the Lord his God, for he entered the temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense."²⁰ He did not receive the reproof, got mad, and was struck with leprosy.

KING AMAZIAH WAS CAUGHT BY PRIDE. "You have indeed defeated Edom, and your heart has become *proud*."²¹ Robert E. Lee had such success on the battlefield that he at least unconsciously thought his army was invincible. Thus, he went into the battle at Gettysburg hastily. Afterward, he did very humbly take the position that the horrible defeat and loss was all his fault.

ISRAEL'S KINGS WERE TO KEEP THEIR 'NOSE IN THE BOOK.' Why? The danger of pride. "It (the Scriptures) shall be with him and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God, by carefully observing all the words of this law and these statutes, *that his heart may not be lifted up above* his countrymen and that he may not turn aside."²² The Bible will keep us from sin, or sin will keep us from the Bible.

KORAH SHOULD HAVE BEEN A HELP TO MOSES. Instead, because of his pride and envy, he was a chief adversary to Moses and then suffered that awful judgment.²³

THE DISCIPLES OF CHRIST WERE CONTINUALLY DISPUTING as to who was greatest.²⁴ Pitiful, isn't it! But it is hard to learn the lesson – the leader is least, last, lowest. Remember Moses. There was no prophet like him – signs, wonders, mighty power, great terror.²⁵ He was intimate with God –

18 2 Chronicles 32:25

19 2 Chronicles 32:26

20 2 Chronicles 26:16

21 2 Kings 14:10f

22 Deuteronomy 17:19f

23 Psalm 106:16, Numbers 26:10

24 Luke 9:46; 22:24

25 Deuteronomy 34:10ff

"face to face." Yet, "the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth."²⁶

DIOTREPES WAS IN TROUBLE before God and before the Apostle John. Why? He "loved to be first among them."²⁷ There's nothing wrong with leadership, but we dare not *love first place*. He loved it so much that he held others at a distance – "he does not receive the brethren." And those that did receive them, he put even them out of the church. Such excommunication was a high-handed action in itself, for, it should have had the consensus of the church.²⁸

THE PHARISEES LOVED THE ATTENTION. They "loved the positions of honor," the respectful greetings, the titles, and the religious robes.²⁹ They wanted to be "noticed" by men.³⁰ But it brought upon their heads awful curses from Christ. "Woe to you when *all men speak well of you*, for their fathers used to treat the false prophets in the same way."³¹

THE LORD DEALT SEVERELY, YET KINDLY WITH THE APOSTLE PAUL. A thorn in the flesh. A messenger of Satan. Why? To keep him from "*exalting himself*."³² Affliction is such a preventative.

THE LORD JESUS KEPT FREE OF PRIDE. In the wilderness temptation the devil called Him, "Son of God." But the Lord took the humble position and in His response called Himself, "Man."³³ Yes, in all the incarnation He went low – more than if angels became bats or kings became worms – and "therefore God highly exalted Him above all."³⁴ Let's follow His example. God is looking for the humble and contrite.³⁵ Someone wanted to interview Rees Howells, a man noted for answered prayers. He declined saying, "I don't want to lose my power." There are plenty of opportunities for the pastor to humble himself and that's where he will find true power, authority, and the presence of God, for "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."³⁶

26 Numbers 12:3

27 3 John 9,10

28 Matthew 18:17; Acts 15:22

29 Matthew 23:6

30 Matthew 23:5

31 Luke 6:26

32 2 Corinthians 12:7

33 Matthew 4:3,4

34 Philippians 2:9

35 Isaiah 66:2; 57:15

36 1 Peter 5:5; Matthew 23:12