

If My People - 8

Pride and Humility (1)

We finally come now to the part you've all been waiting for - the part that deals with humility and pride. I know how desperate you are to get to this section of 2 Chronicles 7:14 and just to make sure you are not disappointed, I shall be spending several weeks here before moving on!

However a word of warning first: Satan is real and the powers of darkness are active whenever the Word of God is preached – but especially this word! The enemy of God has been waiting patiently for this part of the teaching series because he wants me to preach about pride more than anyone. He is ready, willing and more than able to take my words of exhortation and instruction; words which are intended to bring life and light and hope and personal transformation; words which are meant to change us more and more into the image of Jesus; the Devil wants to take those words and attach discouragement, doubt, fear, depression, guilt, condemnation and a sense of hopelessness.

That is always Satan's agenda and unless you are aware of his schemes and alert to his plan, you will fall victim to his ministry of darkness so that teaching which is intended to release you will actually bind you; words which should bring you hope will bring you despair. So be warned.

All truth is confrontational - I make no apology for that. When the light of God's Spirit shines into our wicked hearts, it can really sting and make us want to hide as we are confronted with some pretty horrible realities. When the conviction of the Holy Spirit reveals stuff in us that needs dealing with – it is not a pleasant experience in the flesh. In fact our fallen flesh will often fight against it and this can produce a huge struggle within us. Yet in that struggle we must take heart because:

When God is at work, there should be absolutely NO guilt, NO condemnation, NO discouragement, NO doubt and NO fear - because we know that we are saved, redeemed, reconciled and loved by God; we know that we are forgiven, cleansed and renewed - absolutely nothing His Spirit dredges up in our heart is going to change that.

Do I hear an amen?!

When we understand God's grace and our relationship with Him is secure and not based on the purity of our own fallen heart – then we can let God's Spirit expose anything and everything in us without fear. In fact - we should welcome it! We really need to have that stuff exposed and removed so that we can be more effective disciples for Jesus; so that we can be used by Him in mighty ways, without any hindrance or burden.

It is important that the pride and sin in our hearts is revealed for us - not for God. That stuff which we deny and lock away inside is hurting us and attracting the ministry of Satan. He inhabits that pride and sin; it is an open door for him to render us ineffective in our ministry and in our life. We really should welcome the probing and the pain that sometimes comes when the Spirit of God exposes the truth in our own hearts. It may not be enjoyable, but the outcome is new life, renewed power and positive fruit beyond our imagination.

Through this teaching, the confronting light of God will shine brightly and I know it may hurt our eyes at first - we may even want to turn and run. Sadly, a number of people I have preached this to over the years have done exactly that - and this is Satan's intent. He will do whatever you let him do to prevent you from allowing the transforming work of God in your life.

Let me highlight something I just said: **Satan can do NOTHING other than what you allow.** He has no authority over you, other than that which you give him by allowing him access into your life. If you feel discouragement, depression, doubt, fear or condemnation of any kind from anything I say or anything you read in these sermons, you need to know that you are not getting that from me; you are not getting that from God; you are listening to Satan and his religious spirits which seek to drag you down and stop you from being all that God created and redeemed you to be.

The Bible says that we should be transformed by the renewing of our minds (Rom.12:2). What you think will determine how you live, so you need to think the right stuff about God and your life and Satan and the conviction of sin and God's purposes in revealing truth to you.

If you understand grace and know the love, mercy and forgiveness of God; if you know that nothing you do or don't do will ever change God's love and grace toward you, then you will be free to have your heart, your motives and your deepest thoughts stripped naked before God without any fear. In fact you will be as excited as a sick person is when the doctor walks into the room and announces that he has found the problem! At last, your pain will end. So let's be brave, ok? Pray with me now:

Come Holy Spirit ... come Great Physician ... probe, cut, examine, expose, reveal all that is in us that does not belong; all that is in us which is hurting us and rendering us ineffective in our quest to see this city and this nation embrace the Lord Jesus. Come and do what you need to do. Give us courage. Give us faith. Give us courage. Give us strength and persistence. In Jesus' name we pray, amen.

Humility is not a popular human trait in the modern world. It's not promoted in the talk shows or celebrated in valedictorian speeches or commended in seminars or listed as a core value in mission statements of large corporations – or most Churches for that matter! If you go to the massive self-help section of most libraries or bookshops you won't find books on humility.

The basic reason for this is simple: **true humility can only thrive in the presence of God.** Where God goes, humility goes. In fact you might say that humility follows God like a shadow. We can expect to find humility applauded in our society whenever we find God applauded - which means almost never.

The following extract is from an editorial which appeared in a large newspaper some years ago and I think it captured the atmosphere that destroys humility:

“There are some who naively cling to the nostalgic memory of God. The average churchgoer takes a few hours out of the week to experience the sacred ... but the rest of the time, he is immersed in a society that no longer acknowledges God as an omniscient and omnipotent force to be loved and worshiped. Today we are too sophisticated for God. We can stand on our own; we are now prepared and ready to choose and define our own existence.”

What a sad, but accurate commentary on life in the 21st Century. In such an atmosphere, humility cannot survive. It disappears along with any concept of God. When God is neglected, the runner up 'god' takes His place, namely, man ... and that by definition is the opposite of humility: PRIDE.

So the very atmosphere we breathe in this fallen world is hostile to humility. I want us to look at some words from the Apostle Peter – words which will seem utterly foreign to our society and life as we know it in this nation in the 21st century - but words which are vitally necessary to hear. If what is said in this passage doesn't take root in our lives, then I am afraid that effectively speaking, we will not be a Christian church - we will not be salt and light in a perishing world and God will not heal this land through us.

1 Peter 5:5-7 *“Young men, in the same way be submissive to those who are older. All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 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.”*

The main point of this passage is that we Christians should be humble people. The exhortation comes in one form or another three times:

- 1) Verse 5a: *“Young men, be submissive (i.e., be humble toward) to your elders.”*
- 2) Verse 5b: *“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another.”*
- 3) Verse 6: *“Humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God.”*

So the main point is plain in these three verses: humility is essential in the life of a Christian. It is a defining mark of a true Christian. Peter also gives reasons or incentives - at least four.

- 1) Verse 5b: *“God opposes the proud.”* Nothing could be worse than to have an infinitely powerful and holy God opposed to you. So don't let pride have its way. More on this at another time.
- 2) Verse 5b: *“God gives grace to the humble.”* And nothing could be better than to have an infinitely powerful and wise God treat us graciously. He does that to all of us in many ways ... but He especially does that to the humble. The reason is clear: **Humility is not a performance of virtue that earns grace. Humility is a confession of emptiness that receives grace.** *“Blessed are the poor in spirit (humble), for theirs is the kingdom of Heaven.”* (Matthew 5:3)
- 3) Verse 6: God will use His mighty hand to exalt the humble: *“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that He may lift you up (or exalt you) at the proper time.”*
- 4) Verse 7: God will use His mighty hand to care for the humble: *“Cast all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you.”*

Be a humble person because, if you are proud, God will be against you in your pride, but if you are humble He will give you grace, exalt you in due time and care for you along the way so that you don't have to be anxious. That's the basic message of this text. Now how shall it take root in our minds and hearts and make a powerful difference in the way we live to God's honour?

Let me try to make it sink deeper into us by asking two questions:

1. What is pride and humility?
2. What is the connection between humility and not being anxious?

I'll start with the second one. In some translations and in the Greek, there is a definite grammatical connection between verses 6 and 7 and therefore it should read like this:

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time, casting all your anxiety on Him because He cares for you."

It's not really a new sentence. It's actually a subordinate clause. *"Humble yourselves . . . casting your anxieties on him."* Therefore, casting your anxieties on God is an expression of humility.

For example, it's like saying,

"Eat politely ... chewing with your mouth shut."

"Drive carefully ... keeping your eyes open."

"Be generous ... inviting someone over for a meal."

"Humble yourselves ... casting your anxieties on God."

One way to be humble is to cast your anxieties on God. Which means that one hindrance to casting your anxieties on God is pride. Which means that undue worry about your future is a form of pride. Now there is more to say about that, but to feel the full force of it we need to answer the first question, and then come back to this connection between pride and anxiety.

So what is pride and humility? I'll try to answer that with ten Biblical observations about pride. And then you just need to assume that the opposite of these ten things is humility.

1. Pride is self-satisfaction

God says to Israel in Hosea 13:4-6, *"I have been the Lord your God since the land of Egypt . . . I cared for you in the wilderness, in the land of drought. As they had their pasture, they became satisfied, and being satisfied, their heart became proud; therefore, they forgot Me."* (Cf. Jer. 49:4)

2. Pride is self-sufficiency and self-reliance

Moses warns the people of God in Deuteronomy 8:11-17 about what will happen when they have rest in the promised land:

"Beware . . . lest, when you have eaten and are satisfied, and have built good houses and lived in them, and when your herds and your flocks multiply, and your silver and gold multiply . . . then your heart becomes proud, and you forget the Lord your God who brought you out from the land of Egypt . . . [and you] say in your heart, 'My power and the strength of my hand made me this wealth.'"

God's goodness is turned into self-sufficiency.

3. Pride considers itself above instruction

In Jeremiah 13:9-10 God says to the people of Judah:

"I will destroy the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem. This wicked people, who refuse to listen to My words, who walk in the stubbornness of their hearts."

Pride stubbornly refuses to be taught the way of God, and makes its own wishes the measure of truth.

4. Pride is insubordinate

Psalm 119:21 says, *"You rebuke the arrogant, the cursed who wander from your commandments."*

When the decrees and Word of God are spoken, pride turns away and will not submit. It rejects the right and authority of God to tell us anything.

5. Pride takes credit for what God alone does

One of the most vivid illustrations of this is the case of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon in Daniel 4:30-32:

[Nebuchadnezzar said], "Is this not Babylon the great, which I myself have built as a royal residence by the might of my power and for the glory of my majesty?" While the word was in the king's mouth, a voice came from heaven, saying, "King Nebuchadnezzar ... sovereignty has been removed from you ... until you recognize that the Most High is ruler over the realm of mankind, and bestows it on whomever He wishes."

Then, after his season of humiliation grazing in the fields like an ox, Nebuchadnezzar is restored and confesses:

"Now I, Nebuchadnezzar, praise, exalt and honour the King of heaven, for all His works are true and His ways just, and He is able to humble those who walk in pride."

6. Pride exalts in being made much of

Jesus indicted the religious leaders in Jerusalem for this in Matthew 23:6

"And they love the place of honour at banquets, and the chief seats in the synagogues, and respectful greetings in the market places, and being called by men, Rabbi."

7. Pride aspires to the place of God

The story of Herod in Acts 12: 21-23 is one of many we could quote here:

"And on an appointed day Herod, having put on his royal apparel, took his seat on the rostrum and began delivering an address to them. And the people kept crying out, "The voice of a god and not of a man!" And immediately an angel of the Lord struck him because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and died."

This one act did not bring the wrath of God on its own - but a whole life devoted to playing God resulted in Herod's demise. Pride can have disastrous effects if not exposed.

8. Pride opposes the very existence of God

Psalm 10:4 *"In his pride the wicked man does not seek him; in all his thoughts there is no room for God."*

Pride knows that the simplest solution for its own survival would be that there be no God at all. That would be, as the Nazi's might say, "The Final Solution" for the survival of pride. It doesn't come as any surprise then that:

9. Pride refuses to trust in God

Proverbs 28:25 contrasts arrogance and trust: *"An arrogant man stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will prosper."*

Pride cannot trust God. It sees the posture of trust as too weak - too dependent. Trust calls too much attention to the strength and wisdom of another. Trusting God is the heartbeat of humility, trusting God is the opposite of pride.

When pride keeps us from trusting in God to take care of us there are two possibilities: one is that we feel a false security based on our own imagined power and shrewdness to avert catastrophe. The other is that we realize we cannot guarantee our security, and so we feel anxious and fearful. Either way – pride is at work.

Which brings us to the tenth trait of pride and the final explanation about the connection between 1 Peter 5:6 and 7.

10. Pride is anxious about the future

In Isaiah 51:12-13 God says to anxious Israel that their problem is pride:

"I, even I, am He who comforts you. Who are you that you are afraid of man who dies, and of the son of man who is made like grass; that you have forgotten the Lord your Maker?"

What a confronting word from God today! *Who do you think you are to be afraid?* Sounds strange doesn't it? But that's how subtle pride is. Pride is the root of our anxiety. Now we can see clearly and feel the force of 1 Peter 5:6-7,

"Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that he may lift you up in due time."

How? In what way shall you humble yourselves? Answer (v. 7): by *"... casting all your anxiety upon Him, because He cares for you."*

In other words, the most humble thing in the world we can do is trust God with everything in every way. Casting your anxieties on God means trusting the promise that He cares for you and has the power and the wisdom to put that care to work in the most glorious way.

That kind of trust is the opposite of pride. It's the essence of humility. It's the confidence that the mighty hand of God is not over you to crush you but to care for you just like the promise says. Don't be proud, but cast your anxieties on Him because He will care for you. Whenever your heart starts to be anxious about the future – speak truth to your own heart and say:

"Heart, who do you think you are to be afraid of the future and nullify the promise of God? No, heart, I will not exalt myself with anxiety. I will humble myself in peace and joy as I trust this precious and great promise of God - he cares for me."

I want to encourage you to read and re-read the manuscript of this sermon and study these ten manifestations of pride more closely - seeking God as He attaches some specific issues, attitudes and practices to them from your life at the moment.

We will be digging deeper over the coming weeks in order to nail down some of those specifics – but I would encourage you not to wait for me - but to make an appointment with the Great Physician this week. Ask Him to examine you and expose anything and everything which may be in you which will harm you and those around you. Any thoughts, attitudes, feelings, past hurts which we have not let go of, anger, resentment, bitterness, arrogance and pride ... all of it ... whatever is in our hearts which the enemy of God can use to hinder our spiritual growth and effectiveness.

Let's choose this day to lie on that operating table and trust the One Who knows what to do as He exposes and removes every last cancerous thought, attitude and habit which may lie within us.

I want to pray for us now. If you can embrace this prayer, then make it your own and trust God to answer you in the days ahead:

We love You Lord ... and we know You love us with an everlasting love. We know You care for us deeply and want the very best for us. We know that Your grace and love and mercy cover us like a blanket and nothing can change that.

We also know Lord that we continue to sin, though forgiven ... We continue to fear, though filled with Your peace ... we continue to doubt, though we know You are faithful ... we continue to miss the mark, though You have done everything for us in order for us to live an abundant, fruitful life.

So we cry out to You this day and ask that in Your grace and mercy and love, You might take that holy scalpel and cut right through our hearts and reveal every last cell of disease ... every presence of the cancer of sin ... every molecule that does not belong ... all the doubt and fear and anxiety and bitterness and resentment ... all of it Lord ... and with the skill of the best Surgeon in the universe ... remove it all and restore us to full health and wholeness and power and effectiveness.

You will do all the repair work ... if we would just humble ourselves and submit to You this day and let You shine Your powerful light into our hearts as You carry out an operation which will have the most amazing and life-changing effect on us. Give us the courage to submit and trust and yield and humble ourselves under Your mighty, but ever-so-gentle hand.

In the matchless and blessed name of Jesus we pray, Amen.