

## THE FOOLISHNESS OF PRIDE

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***"God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble... Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time"*** 1 Peter 5:5-6

One of the greatest hindrances to Revival is pride amongst the Lord's people.

### **Pure and Perfect?**

I have heard a mission leader declare: *"I only want what God wants!"* The Scripture declares that our righteousness is as filthy rags, that we should, after we have done all, admit that we are but unprofitable servants. Yet this individual would have us believe that his motives and intentions are completely pure and sanctified, that he *"only wants what God wants!"*

The Word of God categorically states: ***"As it is written: there is none righteous, no not one; there is none who understands; there is none who seeks after God. They have all turned aside; they have together become unprofitable; there is none that does good, no not one."*** Romans 3:10-12

### **Are You a Good Person?**

Yet, when one asks people in the streets: *"Are you a good person?"* Most people respond very confidently; *"Yes! I am a very good person!"*

When various scandalous affairs of Bill Clinton had been exposed, he met with a group of pastors and declared to them: *"I have a good heart!"*

Yet, the Lord Jesus Christ taught; ***"...no one is good, but One, that is, God"*** Mark 10:18 and ***"For out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies."*** Matthew 15:19

### **Too Proud to Preach to Youth**

Shortly after my conversion I was shocked to find a theological graduate who was too proud to speak to a youth group, or join in evangelistic outreaches. I was quite excited when I heard that this graduate was returning from theological college. He had been studying the Word of God for five years. I immediately invited him to speak to our youth group, but he looked at me with disdain and declared that he had not studied at theological college for five years just to speak to a youth group!

I invited him to speak to my Bible class, and to join us for an evangelistic outreach we were planning. He made it very clear that such activities were quite beneath him. He sat for over a year waiting for *"a call"* but was unwilling to engage in evangelism during that time.

***"But if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself."*** Galatians 6:3

### **Too Few**

It was also a shock during my military service when the chaplain arrived for a mid-week chaplain's service only to turn around and, disgusted, declared: *"I am not going to waste my time on just a handful of people!"* There were 80 of our company gathered in the hall for the mid-week chaplain service, but this minister did not seem to think that we were worth his time. Most of the unit were

still out on field practicals seeking to find their way back to base with compass and map work. Our 80 odd men were the only ones who had arrived back in time for the chaplains period.

As it so happened, the men were not keen to give up this break in our hectic training schedule and go back to drilling, so they started to shout for me (their resident religious fanatic) to come and present a sermon. I was a rifleman in training, just as they were, with the same shaven head and brown uniform. However, I rose to the challenge and gladly seized the opportunity that the chaplain had just scorned. If our Lord Jesus could minister to one woman at the well and to Nicodemus alone, how can we be concerned about numbers.

### **Willing and Available?**

Often, after speaking on missions at various churches, I have had some individual approach me and declare: *"When I was young I made myself available to God. I said I would go anywhere He sent me, do anything He told me, but nothing! God never guided me. I was available, I was keen to go, but God never gave me the green light."*

I would always find these testimonies unbelievable. By their account, their motives were pure, their hearts were fully surrendered, they were eager and willing, but the only problem was that God neglected to guide them! This kind of self-justification borders very dangerously on taking the Lord's Name in vain. It insinuates that if there was any fault it was on God's side. It is simply incredible that anyone could suggest that their heart, mind and soul was perfect, surrendered, willing and available, but somehow, God dropped the ball.

***"Behold the proud, his soul is not upright in him but the just shall live by his Faith."***  
Habakkuk 2:4

### **Spiritual Inactivity?**

Another phrase that I frequently heard which indicates dangerous spiritual pride is: *"I will not do anything unless God guides me!"*

### **Humble and Teachable**

The Scriptures teach: ***"The humble He guides in justice, the humble He teaches His way. All the paths of the Lord are mercy and truth, to such as keep His Covenant and His testimonies."*** Psalm 25:9-10

There is no doubt that God gives the very best to those who leave the choice to Him. The Will of God will never lead us where the Grace of God cannot keep us. The question is: Am I humble and teachable?

### **Guided by God's Word**

***"Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."*** Psalm 119:105

God guides us first and foremost through His Word. The best way to know the Will of God is to study the Word of God. We need to know the Word of God and the God of the Word. ***"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work."*** 2 Timothy 3:16-17

### **Renewing our Mind**

It is our priority to ensure that we are not conformed to this world, but transformed by the renewing of our minds, then we will be able to prove what is the good and acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:2).

## First Things First

When we get our priorities straight: **"Seek first the Kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you"** Matthew 6:33, everything tends to follow from that.

**"The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord, and He delights in his way. Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down, for the Lord upholds him with His right hand."** Psalm 27:23-24

## Trust and Obey

The Will of God is no mystery for us discover. He has made His Will abundantly clear in the Bible. **"If anyone loves Me, he will obey My teaching..."** John 14:23 It is God's Will that we do restitution, return things that we have borrowed, restore property to its rightful owner. Repair or replace items that we have damaged, make right with individuals whom we have wronged.

## Super Spiritual Excuses for Inactivity

However, the super-spiritual want specific guidance for every aspect of life. When you invite them on an evangelistic outreach they respond: *"I will pray about it."* When you invite them to a prayer vigil, they also want to pray about it. Generally such people don't *"feel led"* to actually do what the Bible clearly commands us to do, which is to pray to God and proclaim the Gospel to the unsaved.

**"Woe to those who are wise in their own eyes and prudent in their own sight!"** Isaiah 5:21

## Inconsistent

Not that anyone can be consistent with this position of refusing to do anything unless receiving direct guidance from God. Do we wait for Divine guidance to shop, cook and eat food? Do we require guidance before we brush our teeth and wash our bodies in the morning? Do we need guidance as to whether we will go into work and fulfil our obligations each day? No, hardly. It is not necessary to receive specific guidance to daily duties, Biblical commands and personal responsibilities. We are expected to use common sense and be diligent and dependable in our duties.

**"He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife. But he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered."** Proverbs 28:25

## "I Only Read the Bible"

Spiritual pride is also seen in those who declare: *"I only read the Bible!"*

Of course, we must be Bible based Christians. We need to be soaked and saturated in the Word. We need to be like the Bereans who were more noble than the rest **"...in that they received the Word with all readiness, and searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so."** Acts 17:11

## Nothing to Learn From Others?

However, to refuse to read good Christian books, discipleship materials and Bible study aids, is to stifle our Spiritual growth. **"Have you heard the counsel of God? Do not limit wisdom to yourself."** Job 15:8

It is extreme pride to assume that we can understand more of the Bible than the Church fathers, Reformers and faithful students of the Word who have gone before us. There are others who have more diligently studied the languages of Hebrew and Greek, the cultures, histories and geography of Bible lands. It is extremely unlikely that any of us will understand the Word of God better on our own than we will as part of the worldwide Church of all ages. For the expenditure of a few hours we can benefit from lifetimes of study from some of the greatest Bible teachers in Church history. Why would one want to deprive oneself of the Biblical insights of faithful servants of God such as

Augustine, Martin Luther, William Tyndale, Heinrich Bullinger, John Calvin, John Bunyan, Jonathan Edwards, Andrew Murray, Charles Spurgeon and so many others?

**"A haughty look, a proud heart and the ploughing of the wicked are sin."** Proverbs 21:4

The Lord Jesus warns us of: **"thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lewdness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness..."** Mark 7:22. Here pride is in the middle of a list of heinous offences.

### **The Pride of Pharaoh**

There are many examples in Scripture of God resisting the proud. The pharaoh of Egypt was proud; **"Who is the Lord, that I should obey His voice... I do not know the Lord, nor will I let Israel go."** Exodus 5:2

The arrogance of Pharaoh spelt disaster for the Egyptian empire. The pride of Pharaoh led to complete economic, social and military catastrophe. After God had judged Egypt with the ten plagues, the superpower of the world was crippled and never fully recovered.

**"Everyone that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord."** Proverbs 16:5

### **Nebuchadnezzar's Boasting**

When King Nebuchadnezzar boasted **"Is not this great Babylon that I have built for a royal dwelling by my mighty power and for the honour of my majesty."** Daniel 4:30 God rebuked his pride and he was driven out from men and lived amongst the animals in the field until he acknowledged and honoured the greatness of Almighty God.

**"A man's pride shall bring him low."** Proverbs 29:33

### **Belshazzar's Blasphemy**

King Belshazzar offended God by his blasphemous abuse of the consecrated items from the Temple in Jerusalem for a drunken feast. The hand of God wrote words of Judgement on the wall and Daniel explained to him: **"You have lifted yourself up against the Lord of Heaven... the God who holds your breath in His hands and owns all your ways, you have not glorified."** Daniel 5:23

**"Mene, Mene, Tekel, Upharsin."** Number, number, weight, division. God has numbered your kingdom and has finished it. You have been weighed in the balances and found wanting. Your kingdom has been divided and been given to the Medes and the Persians. That very night, king Belshazzar of the Chaldeans, was slain and his kingdom was conquered by the Medes and the Persians.

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

### **Herod's Arrogance**

When king Herod arrayed himself in royal apparel and sat on his throne, **"...the people kept shouting, 'the voice of the God and not of a man!' Then immediately an angel of the Lord struck him, because he did not give Glory to God and he was eaten by worms and died."** Acts 19:22-23

**"Even so the tongue is a little member and boasts great things. See how great a forest a little fire kindles!"** James 3:5

**"The pride of your heart has deceived you..."** Obadiah 1:3

## **Hanged on His Own Gallows**

The book of Esther records the catastrophic destruction wrought on the wicked Haman and his family because of his pride. *"When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow or pay him homage, Haman was filled with wrath"* Esther 3:5. It was because of Haman's extreme pride that his plot unravelled and he ended up hanged on the gallows he had built for Mordecai.

***"Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth."*** Proverbs 27:1

## **Taking Offense**

We also read in the Scriptures of Naaman, from Syria, having his pride offended when the prophet did not come out and speak to him personally, to heal him of his leprosy (2 Kings 5:11).

## **Personal Pride can Lead to National Catastrophe**

When king Uzziah *"was strong his heart was lifted up to his destruction, for he transgressed the Lord his God by entering the Temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense."* 2 Chronicles 26:16

Of king Hezekiah the Scripture says: *"his heart was lifted up, therefore wrath was looming over him and over Judah and Jerusalem"* 2 Chronicles 32:25. Clearly personal pride in national leaders can lead to national catastrophe.

Our Lord Jesus Christ warned of the danger of pride as he taught on the pharisee who dared to come into His house and pray to himself: *"God, I thank you that I am not like other men..."* Luke 18:11

The Lord Jesus condemned the church of Laodicea: *"Because you say I am rich, have become wealthy and have need of nothing - and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked."* Revelation 3:17

*"Now some are puffed up..."* 1 Corinthians 4:18

## **Ignoring Wise Counsel**

In 2 Chronicles 10, we read of the catastrophic consequences of the pride of king Rehoboam. *"The people of Israel petitioned the king: your father made our yolk heavy, therefore lighten the burdensome service of your father, and this heavy yolk he put on us and we will serve you."* 2 Chronicles 10:4

The elders who had stood before his father Solomon counselled: *"If you are kind to these people and release them, and please them, and speak good words to them, they will be your servants forever. But he rejected the advice which the elders had given him and consulted the young men who had grown up with him... then the king answered them roughly... king Rehoboam rejected the advice of the elders, and he spoke to them according to the advice of the young men, saying: 'My father made your yolk heavy, but I will add to it; my father chastened you with whips, but I will chasten you with scourges!'"* 2 Chronicles 10:7-14

As a result of this arrogant reply, distaining the wise counsel of the elders, the ten northern tribes of Israel rebelled against Rehoboam and divided the people of Israel. Rehoboam had to flee in haste.

***"The heart of him who has understanding seeks knowledge."*** Proverbs 15:14

***"A fool despises his father's instruction, but he who receives correction is prudent."*** Proverbs 15:5

**"He who trusts in his own heart is a fool..."** Proverbs 28:26

**"See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise."** Ephesians 5:15

### **A Loathsome Vice**

C.S. Lewis writes about pride in *Mere Christianity*: *"There is one vice of which no man in the world is free, which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagined that they are guilty themselves... there is no fault which makes a man more unpopular and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves."*

**"Do you see a man wise in his own eyes, there is more hope for a fool than for him."** Proverbs 26:12

Pride is the only disease known to man that makes everyone sick except the one who has it. Pride is the ground in which all other sins grow. None are so empty as those who are full of themselves. An egotist is someone who is always me-deep in conversation. Pride is the very image of the devil.

**"For all that is in the world - the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life is not of the Father, but is of the world."** 1 John 2:16

### **The National Religion of Hell**

Pride is the idolatrist worship of ourselves. Pride is the national religion of hell. The first step towards hell is pride. The first step towards Heaven is humility.

Pride thrust Lucifer out of Heaven, Adam out of paradise, Nebuchadnezzar out of men's society, Saul out of his kingdom, and Haman out of the royal court.

**"You boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil."** James 4:16

St. Augustine wrote: *"Men ought to be ashamed of being proud, seeing that God was humbled for his sake."*

*"Those who think too much of themselves, don't think enough."* Amy Carmichael

*"God sends no one away empty, except those who are full of themselves."* D.L Moody

### **Three Tests**

Oswald Sanders recommended three tests to evaluate how much pride we have to repent of:

1. **The test of Precedence.** How do you react when another is selected for the assignment you expected? Or for the office you coveted? How do you react when another is promoted and you are overlooked? When someone else outshines you in gifts and accomplishments?
2. **The test of sincerity.** In your moments of honest self-criticism you will admit many things about your own failings and weaknesses. But how do you feel when others say exactly the same things about you that you, in the sincerity of your heart, have recognised as true?
3. **The test of criticism.** Does criticism arouse hostility and resentment in your heart? Does criticism cause you to fly in immediate self-justification? There is nothing that human pride resents so much as to be rebuked. **"Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord and depart from evil."** Proverbs 3:7

**"The folly of fools is deceit"** Proverbs 14:8

**"For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He catches the wise in their own craftiness."** 1 Corinthians 3:19

### **Pride and Prejudice**

Published in 1813, Jane Austen's novel, *Pride and Prejudice*, is recognised as one of the finest novels in all of history. Is it Elizabeth Bennet who is prejudiced and Fitzwilliam Darcy who is proud? A writer of the depth and subtlety of Jane Austen does not create one-dimensional characters. Her characters are complex, compelling and ambiguous.

The *Pride and Prejudice* of the title apply to both Elizabeth Bennet and Fitzwilliam Darcy. Darcy is proud of his rank and fortune, and prejudiced against Elizabeth's family and her foolish mother. Elizabeth takes pride in her own independence and is prejudiced against what she sees as Darcy's self-importance and snobbery.

**"The fear of the Lord teaches a man wisdom, and humility comes before honour."** Proverbs 15:33

### **Humble Service**

As a young Christian I remember being most surprised and impressed, at seeing the elderly evangelist Roger Volke straightening out hundreds of chairs after the evenings evangelistic rally. It was 1980 and I had organised the Grahamstown Evangelistic Mission with Rev. Roger Volke as the main speaker. The transport hanger at the Grahamstown military base was filled with over 2,000 soldiers of all ranks hearing a dynamic presentation of the Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ.

99 men had come forward that night to commit their lives to Christ. There were only 34 trained counsellors, each of us had to counsel at least three men. It had been a long and busy day. Each day had an average of five evangelistic meetings at local schools, churches and at the military base. Yet, here we were at the end of a very busy day, and a man three times our age was humbly straightening the hundreds of chairs in the transport hanger! Those of us who were not at the coffee bar, felt suitably chastised and immediately threw ourselves into straightening the chairs, so that our guest evangelist could get some well-deserved rest.

### **Hospitality**

As a young 26 year old missionary I was invited to speak at a conference at KwaSizabantu Mission in Zululand. I was mortified when my hosts, Uncle Erlo Stegen and Aunty Kay gave me their bedroom to stay in. I protested that I was used to rolling out my sleeping bag and would be happy for a mattress on the floor. I had certainly slept outdoors often enough and any corner in the mission would be just fine. Uncle Erlo would not hear of it. He insisted. I was astounded that such senior Missionary veterans, more than double my age, would give such a junior missionary their best room.

I wish they had not, but it certainly taught me a whole lot about humility. Throughout KwaSizabantu Mission I saw in practice the principle of Scripture: *"In honour preferring one another."*

### **Take your Pride to the Cross**

God resists the proud, but He gives grace to the humble (James 4:6).

In the words of Isaac Watts' hymn:  
*"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."*

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