

Russell Kelfer

The Perennial Problem of Pride

901-B

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs



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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Note: Russell wrote each of these lessons in a manner that would enable him to clearly communicate them to his weekly class. The grammar or punctuation you encounter may not be technically perfect, but you will certainly “hear” his unique gift for making the message applicable to the common man in everyday situations.

It’s been said of him that he was really a writer who read his stuff. And that’s a very accurate statement!

May you be richly blessed as you “hear” as you read.

The Perennial Problem of Pride

Pride is such an insidious thing. It sneaks into your life and hides there and then catches you by surprise. You remember the story of the godly man that so epitomized the essence of humility that his friends at church gave him a pin that said, “The humblest man we’ve ever known.” Then they had to take it away from him because he wore it!

Oh, the insidiousness of pride. Just when you think you’ve conquered it, you become proud that you have and the sin begins its cycle again. It is insidious! But it isn’t incurable! It is possible for the mind of Christ to so be in control of the Christian that the humility of Christ can be revealed in you in all its quiet, almost invisible beauty. That’s our objective as we begin Lesson 2 in Proverbs, God’s Book of Principles.

We learned last week that the book of Proverbs was written by God through Solomon with the basic objective of what it means to become wise. We saw that wisdom is the essence of God’s character in us. Simply stated, it is the mind of Christ in control of the Christian. To be wise in a certain area means that Jesus Christ in you is living through you the very same life He lived when He inhabited His human body 2,000 years ago.

For us, the process, according to Solomon, seems to take place in three stages.

Stage one- The Christian receives knowledge and the source of knowledge is the Word of God. The definition of knowledge is receiving facts about the mind of Christ.

For example, perhaps you’re reading your Bible or listening to a message and hear for the first time that Proverbs 28:27 says,

He that giveth to the poor shall not lack: but he that hideth his eyes (from their need) shall have many a curse.

And suddenly God gives you a spirit of knowledge. You realize how God feels about helping the poor. He feels so strongly about it

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that He promises a blessing to those who do and a curse to those who don't help the poor. Now you are coming to know the mind of Christ where giving is concerned. But still, that knowledge has not changed your life.

Then one day the Holy Spirit calls to your mind how stingy you really are. You're so stingy you not only don't care if someone has less than you, you're not even interested in giving away your castoffs if they're sellable. Suddenly you realize that God gave up everything to those who have nothing, and you can walk right by literal poverty and not even be concerned. You may call it conviction or whatever you call it, but God has given you a Spirit of UNDERSTANDING. What once was only a fact about God's view of giving has been PERSONALIZED, applied personally to your own giving. You may ask for prayer; you may cry away a box of Kleenex, wear sackcloth and ashes, or whatever you do when you're under conviction. But that's still not wisdom. Then along comes someone with a real need—Jim Smith, a fellow Christian, who through uncontrollable circumstances is left with no way to pay his rent or buy gas or feed his family. Suddenly, the Word comes alive, "He that giveth to the poor shall not lack, but he that hideth his eyes shall have many a curse."

That's knowledge! Then God speaks to you saying, "You need to share with Jim Smith." That's understanding! But you still have a choice. It's not your "natural" bent to give away anything, remember? You're so tight that you squeak when you walk! But you say to God, "I choose to be generous." And God who is perfect generosity takes control of your spirit, and you cannot help but give. You'll give the right amount the right way and be blessed beyond comprehension. Now you are becoming wise where giving is concerned.

So there is the essence of our study. To take the more than 80 subjects that surface in the book of Proverbs, arrange the subjects topically, and examine some of them together in a progressive manner of achieving wisdom, first through those which deal with humility (gaining God's perspective of self); then through those subjects which deal with self-control (gaining God's perspective of choice); on to areas of responsibility (gaining God's perspective of the disciplined life). Lastly we will deal with subjects of generosity (gaining God's perspective of how to give your life away). We're calling them the "Four Faces of Wisdom".

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We began in the last lesson with a preview of God's mind concerning self, and we learned that it all begins with a God's eye view of pride. So that's where we are in this lesson, looking for wisdom concerning "The Perennial Problem of Pride."

Our studies will find their basis in the book of Proverbs, their confirmation in the rest of Scripture, their illustration in the life of Christ Himself, and their progressive revelation through the parables, God's proverbs of the New Testament.

This lesson is entitled "The Perennial Problem of Pride." And here's our outline for the study:

A- Receiving Knowledge about Pride

- 1) How God looks at Pride (Proverbs 16:5, 26:12, 8:13, 6:16; Matthew 11:29, John 5:41,6:15)
- 2) How God responds to Pride (Proverbs 3:34, James 4:6-8, Luke 18:9-14, I Peter 5:5, Isaiah 57:15)
- 3) How God deals with Pride (Proverbs 3:5-8, 16:18, 18:12, 29:23, 15:33, 11:2 Matthew 18:4, 20:25-28)

B- Responding to Understanding about Pride

C- Releasing Divine Wisdom where Pride is concerned

Pride is preoccupation with self. In its most recognizable form, it is called self-exaltation. In its more subtle form it is called self-condemnation. One manifests itself as conceit; the other as insecurity. One calls attention to its goodness, the other to its badness. But both call attention to self. And self, you remember, is dead! What you are really doing is focusing your attention on the:

Residual
Effects of
Self (more on that later)

But self died at Calvary. You're simply trying to call attention to a corpse, while a brand new vibrant life lives in you in the person of Jesus Christ. He wants to be set free to call attention to Himself and to bring life into the lives of other people. So pride, then, is preoccupation with a part of you that no longer exists. No wonder God wants us to stop.

Our study will follow the format Solomon outlined. In this lesson we'll seek knowledge. We'll seek to learn the facts

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about how God feels about pride, how God responds to pride, and how God deals with pride. In the next lesson, we'll look for understanding. We'll take the knowledge we've gained, and with the help of a little quiz or two, we'll look for our own individual PQ (our Pride Quotient).

But for now, let's just look at the heart of God and see how it responds when we call attention to ourselves instead of to Him. Oh, the Perennial Problem of Pride. It's not like so many areas of our lives where we simply choose to obey and the visible tangible evidences are there to confirm our transformation. Not so with pride. It hides in corners. It disguises itself as righteousness, and only on close observation is it revealed to be SELF-righteousness.

Pride comes to church, and whole churches can become proud. Pride enters homes and whole families become proud. Pride is just as much at home in a religious environment as it is in the market place. In fact, Jesus' greatest denunciation of any sin in Scripture was His scathing rebuke of the phony Pharisees, filled with pride, empty of reality. Everybody knew who they were, but so few knew their God. For all they did, they did to call attention to themselves. When they prayed, they stood on street corners and uttered utter eloquence (clothed in flowing robes). When they fasted, everybody knew. When they gave, it was printed in the church bulletin.

They were whitewashed sepulchers. Jesus pointed the finger of God at them and said, "Woe unto you, you hypocrites." (Matthew 23:27) (Which tells you more than a little about how God feels about pride, but so does the book of Proverbs.)

Proverbs 6:16, for instance, asks the question, would you like a list of six things God hates? (No, he says, make that seven!) Without so much as pausing Solomon goes on. First of all, he says, "God hates a proud look," an arrogant personality. It could be the guy or the gal who walks into the room and is crushed if everybody doesn't notice; or that condescending look that stares down in self-righteous disbelief when another Christian falls. Its facial expression saying, "How crude, that would never happen to me." God says, "I hate that."

Proverbs 8:13 says that the wisdom of God detests evil, then it defines evil as pride and arrogance. It is Satan's way of life. In other words, Christ in you is grieved, offended, and disturbed

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over an arrogant spirit or a self-righteous attitude. That means, in simple language, when you're busy calling attention to yourself, you've stepped out of the will of God, out of fellowship, and out of the source of your power. There isn't room for us and Jesus both on the same throne! Whenever we take that corpse called "self" and prop him up on the throne of our hearts, Jesus has to get down. The corpse smells. God hates arrogance. He detests pride.

Every one who is proud in heart (preoccupied with self) is an abomination to the Lord. He shall not go unpunished.
(Proverbs 16:5 NAS)

The Living Bible reads,

Pride disgusts the Lord. Take my word for it-proud men shall be punished.

The word abomination means something detestable, something that smells. It literally means when we let pride rule our lives it makes God sick.

Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit there is more hope of a fool than of him. (Proverbs 26:12)

More hope for a fool! You know how God feels about a fool?

Proverbs 24:7 says a fool can't handle wisdom.

Proverbs 26:1 says a fool can't handle honor.

Proverbs 23:9 says don't even waste your breath on a fool.

But God is saying a fool has a better chance than a man or a woman filled with conceit or pride. The difference is, it's easier to convince a fool of his foolishness than it is to make a proud man see his pride.

God hates pride. That's why Jesus proclaims:

I receive not glory from men; I crave no human honor, I look for no mortal fame. (John 5:42 Amplified)

What a verse to memorize.

My friend, that's the mind of Christ, and the mind of Christ in you and in me has not changed. It seeks no human honor, either. It looks for no mortal fame. It seeks only to elevate the name of the Father, only to bring honor to Him, only to acknowledge Him.

And it (the mind of Christ in us) says "no" to all acclaim

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that prematurely draws attention to this physical realm that is passing away at the expense of the spiritual realm that is eternal.

Jesus, seeing they wanted to make Him King withdrew instead and went up into a hillside to be alone,
(John 6:15 paraphrase)

What an example to follow. They wanted to make Him a king. He already was a king. They had their kingdoms confused. And they sought to offer Him position instead of possession. It was the same offer Satan had made three years before in the wilderness. It made Jesus sick. He wasn't after acclaim. He wanted to make a claim on men's lives instead. So He said of Himself,

Take my yoke upon you and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: (in Me) ye shall find rest (refreshment) for your souls.
(Matthew 11:29)

Rest, and refreshment come when your life is cradled in the arms of humility with all of the spotlight on the One who is holding you and not on you.

The mind of Christ is humility; therefore, God hates arrogance and pride. It makes Him sick. A fool makes more sense to God than that. So Jesus demonstrated with His every breath total, absolute, non-ambitious humility; and Jesus in us will do no less! That's the mind of Christ where pride is concerned. That's knowledge. It says God hates pride and prideful believers break His heart.

Question 2- If that's how God feels about pride, how does God respond to pride when He sees it controlling our lives? Let's ask God for more knowledge.

Surely He scorneth the scorners but He giveth grace to the lowly.
(Proverbs 3:34)

The New English Bible reads,

Though God Himself meets the arrogant with arrogance, yet He bestows His favor on the meek.

The NAB says,

When He is dealing with the arrogant He is stern; but to the humble He shows kindness.

Do you get what God is saying? He is saying not only does God detest pride and an arrogant spirit; but there is a decided

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difference in God's responses to His children based solely on how proud they are. It says God becomes stern and unyielding when the life He is dealing with is prideful. But to the humble and the lowly; He pours out grace, divine enablement, and spiritual power. If this is true, then our spiritual growth and power will be directly proportionate to the humility in our lives. Do you see why we have to deal with this issue first? What good is self control or responsibility or even generosity when a corpse lives on the throne of our lives? Self control without humility is only legalism. It yields no fruit.

You may think, that's a strong assumption to make from one verse, that God's grace is dispensed proportionate to man's pride. True. But truth is best confirmed by truth. And if it's true, the rest of Scripture will validate it.

So look in James,

But He (God) giveth more grace. Wherefore He saith God resisteth the proud, but gives grace unto the humble.

Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. (James 4:6,7)

James says not only does God becomes stern with the prideful, "He resists" the proud, the same way we're supposed to resist the devil. The Greek word used here literally means "to set one's self in battle array against another, to set one's self in opposition to (as an enemy)." It's a war term. It means to stand against, to refuse to give ground or to let another occupy your territory. The same word is used in I Peter 5:5. And once again it validates and confirms Proverbs 3:34.

You younger, submit to those who are older; all of you be subject to each other; and be clothed with humility. For God resists (there's our word), God resists [who?] the proud but He giveth grace to the humble, Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God that He may exalt you in due time. (I Peter 5:5)

Wow! That verse says it all. The essence of Christian freedom is not in having your way, but in yielding your way to others. It says the garment, the uniform of the Christian faith, is humility. We're to put it on and choose to wear it. Because when we're clothed in humility, God's responses to us are totally different. When we're clothed in our garments of pride, God wears His

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battle regalia. He protects His throne from intrusion. He stands against us as though we were His enemies. But when we come clothed in humility without the corpse of self dangling about our neck, He rushes to meet us, floods us with grace, gives us more power to be humble, and multiplies His presence in our lives.

The difference is only in how much pride exists in our lives when we call upon Him. He stands as a defender against those whose hearts are preoccupied with themselves. But, on the other hand, to the humble, those preoccupied only with Him and thus with others, He is our Supply Sergeant. He keeps on passing out more and more grace.

So He warns us to make a choice whatever the cost. Choose to be humble. Scripture says don't worry about being exalted. That's God's job, and He will do it. But He will do it, according to His timing, in due time, when He knows you're ready for it. That's God's response to the humble.

And Psalms 10:17 adds its touch,

Lord you listen when the humble cry. You even prepare their hearts; You incline Your ear.

When Your children come in humility, You handle things at both ends. You ready their hearts, and You turn to listen intently.

Psalm 9:12 goes on,

God does not overlook the way of the humble.

He will not fail to heed their cry. It seems to me that God is saying our power in prayer will be relative to our position with regard to pride. It says He listens when men and women of humility cry out to Him.

Jesus painted us a picture by parable in Luke, chapter 18. We won't take time to read it. Verse nine says Jesus told a story to those who were self-righteous, who tended to exalt themselves. The story went like this. Two men went out to pray. One was a proud, self-righteous religious leader. The other was a cheating tax-collector. The Pharisee prayed first. (Pharisees did everything first.) Loose paraphrase of the Amplified Bible says,

He took his stand ostentatiously, and began to pray thus before *and* with himself: "God, I thank you for me. When I compare my behavior with others, I am delighted"...

(Luke 18:11 loose paraphrase)

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Then he nominates himself for the man of the year award and then he says,

I am not as the rest of men, extortioners, (robbers), swindlers— or an adulterer. God, look at that tax collector. Oh, thank God I'm not like Him!

I fast twice a week. I'm a tither. (Luke 18:11,12 continued)

Here Jesus interrupts his prayer, as though it was all He could take, and records the tax collector's simple prayer.

But the tax collector, [merely] standing at a distance, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven; but kept striking his breast, saying, O God, be favorable (be gracious, be merciful) to me, the especially wicked sinner that I am!

(Luke 18:13 Amplified Bible)

Look at the tax collector's posture (eyes down). He couldn't so much as raise his head. Look at his position (heart broken). Look at his petition, "Oh, God be merciful to me. I am a sinner."

God heard the tax collector. God refused to hear the Pharisee. There is a direct correlation. He resists or stiff arms the proud. He gives grace and reaches out to the humble. So there you have God's mind. He hates pride and arrogance. And there you have God's responses. He actually stands against the proud, while drawing in the humble. He closes His ears to the proud. He opens His ears to the humble.

But just how does God deal with pride? If that's how He feels and that's how He responds, what is His plan to make proud men humble if they do not choose to be? The answer is simple. When we do not humble ourselves, His only recourse is humiliation. He simply lets us dig a hole, then makes certain we fall into it so we'll get His perspective again.

Pride leads to destruction. A haughty spirit has to fall.
(Proverbs 16:18 paraphrase)

Haughtiness always ends in disaster. Humility always ends in honour.
(Proverbs 18:12 paraphrase)

A man's pride shall bring him low, but humble souls obtain honour.
(Proverbs 29:23 paraphrase)

It is a concrete fact. Now go back to Luke, chapter 18, and the parable of the proud prayer we just discussed. Jesus draws the bottom line and makes this earth shaking, heaven shaking

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announcement.

Verse 14, tells you, the tax collector went down to his house justified, forgiven, and in right standing with God; but not the Pharisee. He just went home! And Jesus writes on the tablets of human history once and for all God's law of eternal exaltation. Listen:

For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased (*will be put down*); and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted (*will be lifted up*).
(Luke 18:14b)

Wuest translates it this way,

Everyone that exalts himself shall be brought down to the place where he recognizes his moral littleness and guilt. But he who esteems himself small, inasmuch as he is so, and thinks truly, and therefore-humbly of himself shall be raised to a place of honour.
(Luke 18:14b Wuest)

Jesus reaffirmed it in Matthew chapter 20. He asked, "Do you want to be a leader?" Learn to be a nobody and give yourself away.

Now we're not dealing with just another subject this morning. We are dealing with the root sin of mankind. It was Satan's downfall and legions of angels went with him. It was his message to Eve and she bought the lie, "you can become a god, too." It is at the root of man's rebellion to God, the issue of pride. Man's preoccupation with a corpse called self, a preoccupation that demands that God cannot remain enthroned as Lord. It manifests itself in the way we hold our heads, the way we are condescending in our conversation, the way we demand attention, have to have our way, have to be right, have to be heard, have to be seen, and have to be somebody. It destroys marriages, wrecks churches, and dissolves friendships.

God hates it. It's an abomination to Him. He so hates it that He resists it. He stands against those who are proud, but He runs to meet and opens His arms and pours out His grace to those who are humble. God hates pride and resists it, He passed a law, a spiritual law, and it says this: The measure to which you exalt yourself is the measure to which God will humiliate you conversely. The measure to which you humble yourself, to that measure God will exalt you and make your life count.

I'm here to tell you this morning that when God passes a law,

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He enforces it. He tries, at first, to be gentle with us. He sends us little warning lights that say, “Your hat doesn’t fit anymore.” Or He sends us signals that say, “This started out as My ministry. Why is it that now that I’ve blessed it and given it a measure of what you call “success”, that now it’s your ministry?” He allows us little experiences of humiliation or embarrassment to warn us and bring us back to earth. He may even bring a thorn in the flesh or perpetual humiliation, the way He did for Paul, “Lest he be exalted beyond measure.”

But oh, the perennial problem of pride so blinds the mind to truth that we don’t even see the humiliation as a quiet warning from God. So we dare Him to get our attention some other way. All He wants is to be Lord. All He wants is for us to take that wretched corpse called self down from His throne. Our part is to see pride for what it is and to choose humility which is the mind of Christ. The power to become humble is His part! He can handle His part just fine. Now I don’t know about you, but God’s been trying to get my attention. He’s been saying, “Slow down, Kelfer. It’s not your ministry; it’s Mine. Be careful.” He’s saying, “You’re beginning to look for crowds, to listen for acclaim, to desire success. Do you know what real success is?” God is saying that, “Success is simply Jesus in control of your life.” God’s been giving to me and maybe also to you a word of knowledge, a word of warning about the issue of pride. He’s been showing us, His heart, how He feels when men become preoccupied with themselves instead of Him.

You say, “But there weren’t any cures in this lesson, no steps of action. There weren’t supposed to be. Remember, what we are after is knowledge. That’s the first step. We just want to know how God feels about pride. And I pray we just found out. Now that we know the facts, do we dare to pray this week, “Lord, give us understanding. You’ve shown us how You respond to pride. Now show us more of the pride in our own lives.?” So that we, filled and flooded with the mind of Christ, might let Him, in us, be humble, that we, in Him, might become wise.

THE PERENNIAL PROBLEM OF PRIDE

Oh, the perennial problem of pride
How it sneaks in unawares
It robs us of God's grace and power
It nullifies our prayers.

Oh, the perennial problem of pride
It exalts us against our brothers
It blinds our eyes till all we see
Is self instead of others.

Oh, the perennial problem of pride
It was Satan's cardinal sin
And it steals into our lives until
It makes its mark again.

God hates it—says the Scripture.
He cannot stand to see
His children steal His glory
While crying—Look at me!

It breaks His heart to see us
In our own power strive
To elevate the role of self
As though self were alive!

Pride—God stands against it
He sets Himself apart
But oh, with open arms He comes
To those of contrite heart

Humble yourselves, Beloved
We hear the Master say
And when it's time, I'll lift you up
Because you came My way

Oh, the perennial problem of pride
Must it take its toll?
No Beloved, choose God's way
And God will make you whole!

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