

Russell Kelfer

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

902-B

Series: Living Lessons From Proverbs

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.
INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230 • (210) 226-0000 / 1-800-375-7778 • www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org

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 Spiritual Pride

We are searching for a manifestation of the problem of pride, a manifestation that needs to best be seen through Israel's relationship with Jehovah and our relationship with the Father and with the Church.

We are, remember, looking for understanding, which is a personalization of the subject of pride. Two weeks ago we looked for knowledge. We sought to explore what pride is and how God feels about it. We learned that pride is any form of preoccupation with self either self-exaltation (preoccupation with one's strengths) or self-condemnation (preoccupation with one's weaknesses). Either form exalts self, and self is dead. So we took a look at how God feels when we call attention to that corpse known as self, and we learned that He hates it. Pride is an abomination to God. By further investigation, we found God "resists" the proud. He stiff arms them and keeps them at a distance; but He pours out His grace and gives all of Himself to the humble. That's His position, and that's His perspective. As for His policy, He passed a law that says those who are prideful, God humiliates and those who are humble, God exalts.

So a God's eye view of pride makes it clear that for God to manifest Himself in ever increasing splendor in our lives as Christians, we must deal with the issue of pride. That brought us to our last lesson as we began to ask God to take that knowledge and turn it into understanding, to personalize it, and to bring to light all of the areas in our lives where, through preoccupation with self, we are quenching the Spirit. In the last lesson, we took the Word and simply asked ourselves a series of questions to determine our PQ, our Pride Quotient. In the process, we learned that Satan has five statements he whispers into every man's ear to try to call attention to God's enemy of self. They are these:

1. Look at me.
2. Listen to me.
3. Let me win.
4. Give me mine
5. Give me praise.

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

Though he slightly varies the inflection and occasionally disguises the wording, still self cries out (or at least pretends to) by wanting to be seen, clamoring to be heard, struggling to win, demanding its way, hungering for praise. And we hear those lies from the father of lies and begin to accept them as though they were our inalienable rights as citizens of planet earth. Through the means of religion, education, recreation, entertainment, even in the name of love, we are programmed to give glory to self.

In the last lesson, we examined eight of the areas of conflict between the world and the Word where “self” is concerned. We asked ourselves a few questions to determine just where we stood on the issue of pride. We looked primarily at the issue of “natural” pride which is our preoccupation with the natural man by the world’s standards of success and failure. But here, the focus of our attention is on an even more subtle manifestation of preoccupation with self—spiritual pride. That preoccupation with self wears robes of righteousness; but when the camouflage is stripped away, what remains is simply another variation of God’s great enemy called pride. Our outline is:

- I. The Reality of Spiritual Pride
- II. The Reflections of Spiritual Pride
(Six ways we manifest spiritual preoccupation with self)
- III. The Reasons for Spiritual Pride

Spiritual pride is perhaps Satan’s most impressive touch. Through its deceptive destruction, he has moved right onto the Christian’s home turf, taken the very things that mean the most to us and used them against us. He has, in essence, literally used the building blocks of spiritual success to build an altar to the false god of self. No wonder he’s called an angel of light! But to understand the reality of spiritual pride, we must come to see the difference between Christianity and religion. One is the reality. The other is a counterfeit, an imitation so designed to copy the truth that even a student of the faith can be easily confused. It’s cardinal characteristic is subtlety. It slides its little lies in, in such devious ways that we mistake them for spiritual reality. But look carefully this morning and learn the differences, because religion has as its primary by-product spiritual pride. Christianity has as its primary by-product Godly humility.

- Religion says man is looking for God.
Christianity says God is looking for man.

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

Religion says man must “do” for God.

Christianity says God has done it all.

Religion says man can become.

Christianity says God is; therefore we already are.

Religion says self can please God.

Christianity says self is dead.

Religion says DO!!

Christianity says DIE!!! (& it's done!)

So it really is a “do or die” situation, and the devil has imposed its satanic substitute over the Christian movement in the name of Christ until the world can no longer see the difference. Religion gives man every cause to be proud of himself. Christianity gives none. Religion glorifies the work of man. Christianity glorifies the work of God. The keys are these:

- 1- God alone, through Christ, saved you.
- 2- God alone, by Christ, keeps you.
- 3- God alone, in Christ, enables you to live in victory.

So the core and crux of it all is the cross. If the world sees the church, it will try to imitate its righteousness. If the world sees the cross, it must fall to its knees and receive the righteousness of God. Religion produces spiritual pride. But when Jesus Christ is in control of the Christian, he must cry out with Paul,

But God forbid that I should glory save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ by whom the world is crucified unto me and I unto the world.

(Galatians 6:14)

When you and I are rightly related to Christ and filled with His Spirit, we will not boast of men or methods or means. We will not boast of talents, or things, or theology. We will glory only in the cross. Now Satan has through various cults and pseudo-Christian systems such as Mormonism created cleverly disguised counterfeits of Christianity that simply detour around the cross and, thus, insidiously make gods of self. But for those too theologically educated to fall for that ploy, he has taken a more subtle approach. He takes the truth of the Gospel (that self is dead and Christ is alive), and he mixes in varying amounts of self-exaltation, self-condemnation and self-denial. Then he turns on his mix master of demonic deception, and the concoction he has brewed turns out to be various flavors of spiritual pride. It becomes a religious preoccupation with self, clothed in the

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

garb of righteousness—self-righteousness, if you please. And it is abominable to God.

The Scribes and the Pharisees were God's picture book of spiritual pride. Clothed in religiosity, their pride was based on their phony system of obedience. So when they came face to face with the cross, they simply could not accept it. What we are out to do this morning is to dissect this issue of spiritual pride and place it under the microscope of Scripture. Then we can place our lives under the same microscope to see where we are. Our ultimate goal is wisdom. For the mind of Christ in us is simply to glorify Christ by our every breath.

In this lesson, we'll look at but a few of the reflections of spiritual pride. Then we'll be ready to look at the reasons for spiritual pride, seeking further understanding so that ultimately wisdom might be ours.

Reflection 1- Satan says:

God needs you.

He needs your talent.

He needs your gifts.

And sometimes even well-meaning churches will tell you that. But Scripture answers:

What are you so puffed up about? What do you have that God hasn't given you? And if all you have is from God, why act as though you are so great? As though you had accomplished something on your own?" (I Corinthians 4:7)

Romans adds this for those who think their spiritual gift sets them above the throng:

For I say through the grace given me to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

For as we have many members in one body and all members have not the same office, so we, being many, are one body in Christ and every one members one of another. Having then gifts differing according to the grace given us.

(Romans 12:3,4)

Then he goes on and lists seven spiritual gifts and tells the Corinthians (and us!) simply to exercise our gift as God intended us to do, not separate from but in harmony with the rest of the body.

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

Ask yourself, do you feel your talent entitles you to some kind of special recognition in the kingdom? Do you feel nobody appreciates your talents but you? (That may be your problem.) Do you tend to categorize the spiritual gifts and look down on those with certain gifts because you think they are cold or weak or less productive than you? God hates that. It is the perennial problem of spiritual pride. It's self dressed to go to church. Humble yourself before God. God isn't a talent scout, and the church isn't a theater. We have no right to glory in our talents or revel over our spiritual gift.

Reflection 2- Satan says, "Trust the system." You can be proud of the methods or the organization that seems to have worked for you.

Your Method of Counseling

Your Method of Memorization

Your Bible Study Group

Your Denomination

I love this verse,

Some trust in chariots, and some in horses; but we will remember the name of the Lord our God. (Psalms 20:7)

Here we read of proud men whose trust is in what they have. It says,

Their inward thought is, that their houses shall continue forever, and their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. (Psalm 49:11)

My friend, don't glorify the system. Don't deify the organization. When you get to heaven, it won't be there. And that group or that method may have ceased to be effective long ago.

What do you talk about most freely? Your church? Or your Jesus? Your church won't meet everyone's needs, but Jesus will! Your denomination isn't for everyone. But Jesus is! It's oh, so subtle. But it's oh, so deadly - to glory in the system in place of the Savior.

Reflection 3- Satan says be proud of your facilities, your buildings, the plant you worship in. He wants us to say, "Look what we built for God!" King Nebuchadnezzar had the same problem in Daniel chapter four. He had a dream and Daniel was called in to interpret that dream. And Daniel saw the King brought to the level of an animal because of his pride over the

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

Kingdom and the palace he had built.

Twelve months after this dream, he was strolling on the roof of his royal palace in Babylon. And his pride got the best of him and he said this. 'Is not this great Babylon, that I have built for the house of the Kingdom by the might of my power and for the honour of my majesty?'

While the word was in the king's mouth, there fell a voice from heaven saying, "Oh, King Nebuchadnezzar, to thee it is spoken, the kingdom is departed from thee."

(Daniel 4:29,31)

My Kingdom

My Palace

My Glory

God said, "No, mine!"

So for seven years Nebuchadnezzar lived like a wild man, like an animal in the fields till he came to the end of himself. Then God graciously returned the kingdom to the king. For now the king knew whose kingdom it was. Listen to the difference.

Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of Heaven all whose works are truth, and His ways are judgment. And those who walk in pride He is able to abase!

(Daniel 4:37)

Now it was God's kingdom, God's palace, God's power. Many a church begins to build to glorify the Lord. But after the buildings are built, men come to see the buildings and glorify the buildings. And soon, even those who built them can become proud. Look what we did for our God, they cry. My friend, God doesn't dwell in buildings made with hands. God dwells in lives and changes them. There is not one building built by man that will not one day be destroyed. But there is not one life changed by the power of God that will not stand forever! Christians are in the building business, the eternal business of building lives. So don't boast of your buildings. Boast of the builder, the foundation, Jesus Christ Himself.

Reflection 4- Don't boast of men.

My preacher

My teacher

My disciple maker

My spiritual leader

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

My, My, My! That's wrong, says Paul. The Corinthians, (bless their disobedient hearts, they teach us so much) were all caught up in glorying in men, and they were dividing the flock by exalting their shepherds.

I'm Paul's man." Another added, "I belong to Apollo's church." Paul said, who is Paul? Who is Apollos? "I planted," Paul said, "Apollos watered, But God gave the increase!" We are all laborers together with God. (I Corinthians 5:1)

Then he draws in the net:

Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are yours;
Whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are yours;
And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.
(I Corinthians 4:21-23)

Now that's a command! Let no man glory in men. It will destroy the church. It exalts self, and self is dead.

If God is using a certain man in your life to minister to your life, it's because He knew your needs and chose to meet them that way. Praise Him. That man may be gone tomorrow, but the God who meets your needs will always be there.

Reflection 5- Satan says be proud of how spiritual you are.

You have a quiet time.
You witness.
You give.
You serve.

Jesus had a different perspective. He says,

Take heed that ye do not your alms before men, to be seen of them. Otherwise ye have no reward of your Father which is in heaven.

Therefore when thou doest thine alms do not sound a trumpet before thee as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets that they may have glory of men. Verily I say unto you, they have their reward.

But when thou doest alms, let not thy left hand know what thy right hand is doing,

That thine alms may be in secret: and thy Father who sees in secret will reward thee openly. (Matthew 6:1-4)

Then Jesus goes on, "And when thou prayest," (verse 6) and,

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

“Moreover when ye fast,” (verse 16). Jesus says your spiritual disciplines are no cause for glory, no reason for pride. You can only receive glory for them once, either here or in heaven. Boast of them here and you get your reward here. Keep them between you and God in secret, and your Father who keeps secrets will keep your rewards stored up in heaven for you to enjoy for eternity. No one needs to know how spiritual you think you are because of what you do. If you’re really spiritual, you won’t have to tell anybody. Telling them only proves one thing, you’re suffering from the perennial problem of spiritual pride. It’s true of your physical disciplines, too. Do you know why you tell everyone how many miles a day you jog? To glorify jogging? You can do that without mentioning names. You’re proud of it. And God hates pride.

Reflection 6- Spiritual pride is pride over your theology whether it be the right seminary, the right doctrine, the right stand on that issue; even that divisive, unprovable issue that so tickles men’s ears and divides God’s people.

Paul talks in I Timothy 6:4 about conceited, proud men who have a morbid craving for controversy and who love to dispute the meanings of words. The result of their arguing, he says, is envy, wrangling, slander, bad suspicions, perpetual contentions, using doctrine to draw crowds and make money.

“Hold fast to sound doctrine,” (Titus 1:9) Paul admonished. Don’t compromise your convictions. When you are proud over your right doctrine, that’s a different matter. It breeds people and churches that are so spiritually smug and so spiritually superior that their concept of the body of Christ shrinks from day to day, until they have narrowed the Gospel to their interpretation and spirituality to their concepts. They lose their love, their compassion, their acceptance of others. Christianity becomes a seminary course where you dot the right “I’s” and cross the right “T’s”, and become proud, arrogant, theological geniuses, good for nothing but sharing your exclusive point of view.

I believe a lot of us are going to be really surprised when we get to heaven. There are going to be some folks there who belonged to the church up the street whose doctrine was scandalous to those in our camp. And some of them will wear crowns of glory that our swelled heads can’t wear. We ought to pray for all the body of Christ. We ought to hurt when they hurt and rejoice in

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

their victories. Some of us forget we're running a relay race with the Gospel. We're not running against each other. We pass the baton from one to the other. Satan says if they fall, you'll look better! NO!! The idea is not for us to look good, the idea is to win the race!

We've mentioned this before, but I wonder if we shouldn't have a list of churches in this city who preach Christ crucified, regardless of their label and regardless of their stand on periphery issues. I wonder if we shouldn't have the names of their pastors or lay leaders and pray earnestly for their success. They are not, you know, our competitors. They are our co-laborers.

We need to share prayer requests with other churches, asking them to pray for our needs and really honestly pray for theirs. You say, "Well, I wouldn't feel comfortable worshipping there!" That may be to their credit or to their advantage. Maybe you don't belong there, but does that make them any less a part of the Body of Christ? Or their needs any less important than ours? And do you still pray for the last church you were in? You say, "They didn't preach the Word." All the more reason to pray.

Satan wants to break up the Body into competitive pieces and set them one against the other. And the tool he uses to do it is the Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride.

Those are just a few of the reflections of Spiritual pride that sneak into our Christian life and elevate self in Ecclesiastical robes of self-righteousness. They are subtle intrusions into our spiritual life.

Pride over our talents or gifts.

Pride over the system or organization.

Pride over our buildings.

Pride over our spiritual leaders.

Pride over our spiritual disciplines.

Pride over our theology.

All are good things, but all are only tools in the hand of a sovereign God designed to glorify Him. But Satan takes and slyly pours them into his mix master of self-glory and brews up varying degrees of spiritual pride. These are the reflections, the manifestations of spiritual pride. But there are I believe some reasons these reflections find their ways into our lives and into

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

our churches. We'll discuss 9 of those reasons and analyze our own experiences in the light of those 9 attitudes before we're through. I would like to take just one of them to look at here to give us a taste of what I mean. Then we'll look at the other 8 in our subsequent lessons.

I just want to mention the first reason for spiritual pride is early exaltation: promoting a young Christian to a position of leadership before he or she has had an opportunity to develop as a servant. Paul cautioned the church in I Timothy 3 as he outlined the qualifications for leadership in the church.

He should not be a young Christian for he might become proud and pride comes before a fall. (I Timothy 3:6)

Satan's downfall is proof of that. There is no principle in Scripture more abused than this one. And the ultimate objective of Satan is to take young Christians with the greatest potential for growth and lift them beyond their place. It is a devastating experience. The scene goes like this:

Johnny Jump for Joy comes to know Christ as his Savior. God leads him to the Meanwell Evangelical Church. There he becomes a member. He loves the church. He loves the Lord. He's so excited that he shows up every time the doors are open, and he shows up before they open. He's there every Sunday morning, every Sunday night, every Wednesday night. He comes to every seminar. (He makes the one on Christian dog raising.) He signs up for "How to be a Godly Wife", "Learning to Cope with Mid-life Crisis", and he sits on the front row of "Sam's Seminar on Self-acceptance." He makes the Basic Institute in this, and the not so Basic Institute in that. Pretty soon he can discuss practical theology with the most seasoned church member.

So the Meanwell Church appoints its nominating committee for the church year. They need leadership. What about Sammy Soundoff, someone asks. Not faithful, they cry. He never comes on Sunday night. Scratch Sam. How about Wally Whisperlo? Too quiet! He wouldn't add anything to our meetings. Ronny Runlate? Not a faithful man, they cry. He always comes in late to church. Or Perry Poorboy? No, he doesn't understand the business end of the church. Soon Pastor Dogood has an idea, "What about Johnny? He's here every Sunday. He even comes on Sunday night, the pastor announces, casting a glaring glance at two or three members of the committee who are noted for their absence

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

on Sunday pm. He witnesses. He took the Laymen's Lunch-hour Leadership course, too. Came every night. And he's so faithful! His wife isn't as spiritual as he is, but he's so faithful he leaves her with the six kids, and he comes to church night after night. Why he's here all week long." "Wow!" gasps the committee. Here's the man we're looking for. Here's a potential chairman. Is there a second on Johnny? Moved, seconded, Unanimous. Johnny's our man.

Now you look in on Meanwell Church's program two years later and ask, "What's become of Johnny?" Well, he was elected chairman, and boy was he disillusioned. There was friction from the members, pressure from the pastor, deep trouble at home. Satan just got hold of him, Pastor Dogood answers. Satan did it. My friend, Satan had a lot of help! The leadership of that church did it. Meanwell meant well. But they violated the Scriptures. Young Christians don't need to sing solos, teach classes, or serve on boards. I don't care if they're Vice President of Greenbacks International or past President of the Grimy Gulch Rotary Club. Young Christians need to grow. They need to be bathed in the Book. Young Christians need to serve. Let them park cars, stack chairs, work in the kitchen, paint the building, labor in the shadows. But don't exalt them. You will force God to humble them.

Young Christians need to build their families first. Paul said, "Be sure their home's in order before they take command of the church." You say, "You'll destroy their zeal!" Not if it's of the Spirit! And if it's of the flesh, it needs to be destroyed. I can tell you from experience how devastating this can be.

As a young Christian I was so excited, so zealous. I got promoted far beyond my spiritual years, too much too soon. Praise God for some spiritual saints who prayed that God would bring me down to size. I thought the church needed me. I thought God needed me. And some of you have experienced the same trip. Spiritual pride sets in and you're not mature enough to see it.

And be careful just because you've been disciplined and matured beyond your years in the Word. Take your time before you enter the limelight of leadership. There is a certain kind of maturity that only comes from years and from walking through the fires of testing. That's why even young pastors would do well to serve under before they exercise authority over others.

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

Spiritual pride is so subtle, so disguised in spiritual robes that we miss it. And Satan has taken that old rascal “self”, yanked him out of his coffin, dusted him off, and set him on the front pew. What God is after is serving saints, humble men and women,

not proud of their spirituality

not proud of their church

not proud of their leaders

not proud of their talents

just in love with Jesus.

It is a foot washing kind of saint, not too spiritual to fellowship with the downtrodden. Not too theologically narrow that he can't pray for the whole body of Christ, even the church down the street. Not so enamored with his talent that he pouts if he can't be seen of men. God is looking for men and women who, looking at Jesus, lay aside their robes of righteousness, take on the form of a servant, and give themselves for one another. God will exalt them in due time. If you and I exalt them, we leave God no choice but to humble them.

In our next study together, we'll look at some other reasons that spiritual pride creeps into our lives as Christians. We'll listen to Sammy Saint make such typical remarks as, “No God, do it my way!” “God, I deserve a better deal.” “Ask who? I know the answer!” And maybe, just maybe we can come to recognize the enemy's subtle lies, lies that lead to spiritual pride.

I know we're spending a lot of time on this subject. But I believe it's the foundation stone of the whole study. Once we have a right perspective of self, we can have a right perspective of God and of others. The goal of this study on pride isn't to devastate us or discourage us, but to awaken us and encourage us to so humble ourselves before a sovereign and holy God that He has no barriers to controlling us. With those stumbling blocks moved, we can see His spirit manifest His life without having to stumble over self to get to His rightful place on the throne of our lives. Let's just agree before God for these next two weeks that every time self tries its resurrection routine, every time we begin to call attention to ourselves, to quietly, but instantly turn to God and say,

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

“Forgive me Lord.

I am crucified with Christ: nevertheless I live; yet not I, but
Christ liveth in me: and the life which I now live in the flesh
I live by faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave
Himself for me. (Galatians 2:20)

And apart from Him, I can do nothing. Lord you take over. I'll
give You all the glory.”

And as self makes its hasty exit back to the graveyard, see if
a whole new kind of power doesn't flood your soul and quicken
your step, as you magnify the name, the name worthy of honor,
the name of Jesus.

THE SAGA OF SAMMY SAINT

Oh my, oh my, cries Sammy Saint
Whatever would God do?
If He had to fight His battles,
With just the likes of you!

Thank God, he says, for my church
The one where I belong
Not like those others down the street
They do it all so wrong!

Thank God, he says, for Pastor Fred
Oh, what a Godly saint
He graduated you-know-where
He's right where others ain't!

And look at all our buildings
Cries Sam in prideful tone
We've built a kingdom here on earth
As few have ever known

A well-meaning guy is Sammy
That fact can't be denied
But Sammy's suffering badly
From a thing called spiritual pride

It's not Y O U R church, Sammy
And God is not impressed
That your four story edifice
Stands out o'er all the rest

You don't have all the answers
Wake up, and look around

The Perennial Problem of Spiritual Pride

The power of God is everywhere
You're not the only game in town

God's got saints on every street
Quiet, godly men,
Who've simply let God live His life
Wherever they have been

They're busy sharing Jesus
Showing men they care
They're praying for the likes of you
And you don't know they're there!

Sammy, fall down on your knees
Take your package oh, so neat
And lay yourself and all your pride
Back at the Master's feet

What could God do with this lost world
If Sammy and I and...you
Would humbly all begin to give
God all the praise He's due!

If we'd stop shouting look at us
Look at all we've done
And all together tell the world
Dear world, come meet God's Son!

Oh the power, oh the joy
Oh the Christ-filled days
Once we all discover—HE'S
The only one to praise!!!

dtm DISCIPLESHIP TAPE MINISTRIES, INC.

10602 Mossbank, San Antonio, TX 78230
210-226-0000 or 1-800-375-7778
www.dtm.org • dtm@dtm.org • © Russell Kelfer

(07.23.15)