

The Preacher and Pride

Augustine said that pride is “the love of one’s own excellence” (Taylor, 146). The *New American Oxford Dictionary* describes pride as: the quality of having an excessively high opinion of oneself or one's importance. The root of the Hebrew word for pride means a rising up or growing up. It is used to describe the growth of plants and the rising of water (VanGemeren, 771). Therefore, pride signifies a lifting up of self. The Hebrew word lends itself to the idea that pride grows; it does not just appear one day but develops over time when circumstances are conducive.

Pride can be found in the king’s house as well as in the cobbler’s hovel. Arrogance knows no boundaries. Though haughtiness can be found in every stratum of society, there are some stations in life that nurture the development of pride. One such station is that of leadership. Due to the nature of leadership, pride often appears in those who hold such positions. For

this reason, ministers need to be ever vigilant to avoid becoming arrogant and prideful.

The fear of the Lord is to hate evil: pride, and arrogancy, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate. (Proverbs 8:13 KJV)

When pride is found in the ministry, God deals with it in various ways. We must remember that God hates pride, and He *always* deals with it. Pride in a minister's life creates a very dangerous condition. Job understood the danger of pride and knew that if he lifted his head in pride, God would hunt him like a lion (see Job 10:16 NIV, ESV). The sobering fact is, when pride enters our hearts, God immediately plans to judge it. He becomes the predator, and we the prey. God may tarry in long-suffering, but He will "plentifully reward the proud doer" (Ps. 31:23) in due season. The NIV says, "the proud he pays back in full." The moment a man becomes proud, he begins to lay up an undesirable recompense that will eventually be paid.

Pride negatively rewards a man in various ways. However, it seems that pride follows a common course in the life of a minister. When an arrogant preacher is rewarded for his pride, the judgment often comes through moral failure or false doctrine.

When a minister falls into immorality, the majority of the time, it stems from pride. Proverbs tells us, “The mouth of a strange woman (adulteress, NIV) is a deep pit: he that is abhorred of the LORD shall fall therein” (22:14). It is to be understood that the man was not abhorred because of his immorality. Conversely, it was because he was abhorred of God that he fell into immorality. The strange woman is God’s method of punishment. What would cause a man to be abhorred (hated) by God? There are seven things that God hates; the first on the list is pride (see Prov. 6:16-17). When a minister fails morally, it can often be observed that he was a proud and arrogant man. Why is immorality the “plentiful reward” of pride? Because it brings immense shame and humility.

When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom. (Proverbs 11:2 KJV)

Pride convolutes a man's thinking. When a person becomes overly occupied with self, every thought is flavored by pride. It affects how one reacts in relationships. It influences major and minor decisions. When a prideful person processes information, his calculations, and conclusions benefit self. This is why a prideful man is in danger when he opens his Bible and begins to read because the man who falls into false doctrine is a proud man.

As his epistle begins, Jude immediately assails *certain men* who are spreading the false doctrine of antinomianism (Jude 3). Throughout his warning letter, he describes the character of those who are guilty of this heresy. They despise and speak evil of authority (1:8); they are likened to Korah, Cain, and Baalam (1:11)—prideful characters all. Jude continues to lucidly paint a very unflattering picture of these false teachers. What we see when he concludes is a portrait of the arrogant.

Paul's characterization of false teachers harmonizes with that of Jude. The apostle expresses to Timothy that those who do not teach the doctrine are "proud, knowing nothing" (1 Tim. 6:3-4). In Romans, Paul deftly sums up the heretic when he says, "Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools" (1:22). In this brief statement, a volume is spoken. When men venture off into false doctrine, they generally are just trying to appear wise. To put it more succinctly, they are trying to appear wiser than others. Have you ever seen a humble preacher promulgating and vehemently contending for false doctrine?

Pride is a destroyer. Proverbs tells us that pride precedes destruction, and arrogance comes before a fall (16:18). Oh, how often the destruction and fall come through sexual immorality and false doctrine. However, pride does not always destroy the man or his ministry. There are persons whom God desires to preserve. These would be those who struggle with pride but are not wholly given over to it.

Perhaps they don't want to be proud, but pride is a weakness in their character. In these cases, God gives grace and keeps pride in check.

The apostle Paul was such a preacher who needed grace in the battle against pride. To the Corinthians, he intimates that a thorn was given to him by God with the intent that pride would not arise in his life (2 Cor. 12:7). Had it not been for the thorn, Paul would have been "exalted above measure" (over-lifted up), (Barnett, 567). Some translations make the phrase a bit more plain by translating it "to keep me from becoming conceited" (ESV) and "to keep me from being puffed up" (AMP). Due to the extraordinary nature (and perhaps number) of the revelations given to Paul, he would have developed pride. Instead of allowing pride to destroy Paul, God placed a mitigating pride factor into his life. What this "thorn in the flesh" was, we don't really know. What we do know is that it was Paul's salvation.

In our present day, God is still granting thorns of grace. There are men vulnerable to pride

whom God decides to spare from destruction by sending humbling circumstances into their lives. The thorn may come through a man's marriage, his children, grandchildren, or in his body. Whatever it may be, it is a situation that man cannot change, nor will God change it. It is God's grace, his preservation of a ministry, and a soul.

Why God allows pride to judge some, and yet He saves others by thorns of grace, is beyond our comprehension. The knowledge we rest upon is, "the judgments of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether" (Ps. 19:9).

Whatever the case may be, to be destroyed by pride or to be saved from pride by a thorn, neither scenario is desirable. To avoid these things, ministers must fearfully seek God in humility and pray that their hearts are not fertile ground for the evil seed of pride.

Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any

wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting. (Psalms 139:23-24 KJV)

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