

PRIDE: AN ATTITUDE TO AVOID

Introduction

A man tells of the last visit he had with his father, and the valuable lesson he learned. He visited his father at a home for the aged. As he was leaving, his father escorted him through a narrow hallway that was crossed overhead by a large low beam. As he and his father walked along, engaged in conversation, he did not notice the beam they were approaching. Suddenly his father issued the command, "Stoop! Stoop!"

The son did not understand what his father was talking about and consequently banged his head against the beam. His father said, "Son, as you go through life, stoop low as you go, and you will miss many hard bumps."

The father's message corresponds to that of Scripture: Pride is an attitude to avoid. Let us now consider the subject of pride as we come to our next topical study in the Book of Proverbs.

I. Avoid an Attitude of Pride, Because of Its Consequences (Proverbs 13:10; Proverbs 11:2; Proverbs 15:25; Proverbs 16:5)

Pride only breeds contention, but wisdom is found with those who accept advice. (Prov. 13:10)

One common by-product or result of pride is contention; wherever the attitude of pride is displayed, contention will appear. Consider Galatians 5:26; "*Let us not become conceited—provoking each other, envying each other.*" An attitude of pride or conceit can be conveyed by the way we address others. Do we address them with courtesy and politeness, or do we bark orders and issue commands? An attitude of pride or conceit may also be conveyed by the way we treat others. Do we treat them with respect and dignity, or do we treat them as though their sole function was to do our bidding and fulfill our desires?

What results from exhibiting a spirit of pride and conceit in our dealings with others? We make it very difficult for them to remember that they **are** our servants—just as we are their servants within the church of Christ: "*You were called for freedom, brothers, only do not use this freedom as an opportunity for the sinful nature to express itself; rather, serve one another with love*" (Gal. 5:13.) Furthermore, we make it extremely tempting for them to point out our faults.

Whenever we ascend a pedestal, we invite everyone to direct their attention towards us, and what they usually observe are our faults. By way of illustration: A paint company painted a balloon with their competitor's brand of paint, then they blew up the balloon to show how their competitor's brand cracked and peeled.

When it was blown up, all of its faults were revealed. The same is true when someone is inflated with pride.

An attitude of pride or conceit displayed by ourselves often tends to produce the same attitude in others around us. All of these reactions to and interactions with a spirit of pride tend to produce contention. By the grace of Christ our Savior, let us be diligent to observe the counsel of Scripture:

God has called us to live in peace. (1 Cor. 7:15b)

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but with a humble mind let each one consider others as occupying a higher position than himself. ⁴Let each one be concerned not only about his own interests, but also about the interests of others. (Phil. 2:3-4;) each of us should view himself in the position of the servant of others; and we should not be self-absorbed with our own interests, we should be sensitive to consider and meet the needs of our brethren.

When pride comes, then comes shame; but wisdom is found with the humble.
(Prov. 11:2)

There are occasions when you may be especially tempted to entertain a spirit of pride. One such time is after a prosperous business venture: *“By your great skill in trading you have increased your wealth, and because of your wealth your heart has grown proud”* (Ezk. 28:5.) Another such time is following a promotion to a high and honorable position: *“The king said, ‘Is not this great Babylon that I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?’”* (Dan. 4:30.) These are the words of King Nebuchadnezzar after God had exalted him to the position of sovereign king over the empire of Babylon. Yet another occasion that especially tempts us to pride is after a special honor has been conferred upon us: *“In those days Hezekiah became ill and was at the point of death. He prayed to Jehovah, who answered him and gave him a miraculous sign. ²⁵But Hezekiah’s heart was proud and he did not respond to the kindness shown him”* (2 Chron. 32:24-25a.) King Hezekiah exhibited a spirit of pride after the LORD answered his prayer and miraculously healed him. Still another such occasion is when you have been blessed with exceptional beauty and are admired for it: *“Your heart became proud on account of your beauty”* (Ezk. 28:17a.)

But when you entertain a spirit of pride, you are liable to part company with wisdom. Proverbs 11:2 indicates that wisdom is a close friend of humility, a friend for whom pride has little time and no use. When you make pride your companion, pride will eventually introduce you to folly, and the two of them will lead you down a road that leads to shame. Pride will convince you that you can do something stupid or foolish and get away with it (because you are so very wise or

strong or clever or special.) But the final outcome will not be success; on the contrary, it will prove to be shame.

Jehovah will uproot the house of the proud, but he will establish the widow's boundary lines. (Prov. 15:25)

The picture is that of the proud man being in a condition of apparent security: he is dwelling in a house (as opposed to a tent) with a strong foundation. This sense of invincible security, perhaps self-constructed security, contributes to his sense of pride and arrogance.

But despite the apparent security of the proud man, the LORD uproots his house. The LORD not only opposes the proud, He totally eradicates him: demolishing his “invincible” security and removing every remnant of his presence. Note Obadiah 3-4,

“The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who live in the clefts of the rocks and make your home on the heights, you who say to yourself, ‘Who can bring me down to the ground?’ ‘Though you soar like the eagle and make your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,’” declares Jehovah. (Obad. 3-4)

Everyone who has a proud heart is detestable to Jehovah. Be sure of this: they will not go unpunished. (Prov. 16:5)

Why does God detest the sinful attitude of pride (and all of its manifestations: arrogance, conceit, contempt)? First, because pride is man’s desire to attribute to himself what he has received from God. Second, pride is man’s attempt to usurp for himself the place and the honor that rightfully belong to God. Note the words of Nebuchadnezzar: *“The king said, ‘Is not this great Babylon that I have built as the royal residence, **by my mighty power** and for the glory of my majesty?’”* (Dan. 4:30.) Now compare what Nebuchadnezzar says about himself with what the Apostle Paul says about the LORD God: *“**from him and through him and for him are all things, to him be the glory forever! Amen**”* (Rom. 11:36.) Note that Nebuchadnezzar views his kingdom as having originated **from him**, as being sustained **by him** and as existing **for himself**—his pride causes him to assign to himself the attributes and prerogatives of God. By way of a more contemporary example, a young man exalted in the fact that he was able to make his wife pregnant and thus produce a child, as though it were all his doing and not a gracious gift of God. In contrast to that attitude, note Genesis 30:1-2,

*When Rachel saw that she was not bearing Jacob any children, she became jealous of her sister. So she said to Jacob, “Give me children, or I will die!”² Jacob became angry with her and said, “**Am I in the place of God, who has kept you from having children?**”* (Gen. 30:1-2)

The latter part of Proverbs 16:5 is actually a solemn oath, (it literally reads, “*hand to hand;*” as men would shake hands in pledge,) that God will by no means allow the sinful attitude of pride to go unpunished.

Avoid an attitude of pride, because of its consequences: 1) it produces contention; 2) it leads to shame; and 3) it results in divine judgment.

II. Avoid an Attitude of Pride, By Practicing Its Alternative (Prov. 16:19; Prov. 25:6-7; Prov. 26:12; Prov. 27:1; Prov. 18:12)

It is better to have a humble spirit and dwell with the poor, than to divide the plunder with the proud. (Prov. 16:19)

It is better to have a humble spirit and keep company with the poor (those who have nothing, and are even considered as being outcasts,) than to enjoy great abundance if it means being in the company of the proud.

The point of the proverb is that a humble spirit is to be cherished as being of far greater value than the wealth of the world. Furthermore, do not associate with proud men, avoid them at all costs, so that you do not become like them.

Do not promote yourself in the presence of kings, and do not claim a place among great men; ⁷for it is better if it is said to you, “Come up here,” than for you to be assigned a lower position before the prince your eyes have seen. (Prov. 25:6-7)

Our Lord was alluding to this proverb when He spoke His parable to the Jews who were eager to seek for themselves the place of honor:

When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: ⁸When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. ⁹If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, “Give this man your seat.” Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. ¹⁰But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, “Friend, move up to a better place.” Then you will be honored in the presence of all your fellow guests. ¹¹Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. (Lk. 14:7-11)

The point of the proverb is that we should not seek to honor ourselves, let someone else confer honor upon us: “*Let another man praise you, and not your own mouth; let a stranger praise you, and not your own lips*” (Prov. 27:2.) An old German proverb states: *Eigenlob stinkt* (Self-praise stinks), *Freundes lob hinkt* (A friend’s praise is lame), *aber Fremdes lob klingt* (A stranger’s praise rings), quoted by Keil & Delitzsch in their commentary on *Proverbs* Vol. I, p.199.)

Note: On those occasions when honor is conferred upon you, receive it with gratitude and do not lose sight of the biblical perspective: *“What makes you superior? And what do you have that you did not receive? But if you received it, why do you boast as if it had not been given to you?”* (1 Cor. 4:7.) Paul is reminding the Corinthians of the fact that all spiritual gifts and talents come from the LORD and He is to be acknowledged as the Giver.

Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him. (Prov. 26:12)

A man who is *“wise in his own eyes,”* or in his own estimation, is a man who, animated by a spirit of pride, views himself as being wise and knowledgeable. He is not open to receiving instruction so that he may become truly wise; indeed, he may even treat with contempt and ridicule any attempt to instruct him. Proverbs indicates that there is more hope for a fool than for such a man. That is to say, there is more hope that a fool will listen and learn—and Proverbs has very little hope for a fool!

The point of the proverb is this: do not think that you know all there is to be known, that you are an expert without need of any further instruction, especially in spiritual matters; on the contrary, cultivate a humble and teachable spirit. The Apostle Paul had to inform the Corinthians, *“If anyone thinks that he knows anything exhaustively, he does not yet know as he ought to know”* (1 Cor. 8:2.) Paul here uses the Greek perfect tense of the verb, γινωσκω, (“to know”) indicating a perfect or exhaustive knowledge of a subject, in this case specifically a spiritual subject. Rather than proudly assume that we “know it all,” let us humbly accept the LORD’s offer of counsel: *“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you. ⁹Do not be like the horse or the mule, which have no understanding”* (Psl. 32:8-9a.)

Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day will bring. (Prov. 27:1)

This is the proverb to which James is alluding when he gives the instruction contained in James 4:13-16,

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.”¹⁴Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. ¹⁵Instead, you ought to say, “If it is the Lord’s will, we will live and do this or that.”¹⁶As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil. (Jam. 4:13-16)

A Hollywood producer once commented that film is a lie, because it is all humanly pre-planned to perfection, while life is not under such human control.

The point of the proverb is that you not assume that you are in control of your life; recognize that your life is under the LORD's control. As James reminds us, we ought to say, *"If it is the LORD's will, we will live and do this or that."*

Before his downfall a man's heart is haughty; likewise, humility comes before honor. (Prov. 18:12)

Consider the life of Joseph as an illustration especially of the latter part of this proverb, as the Psalmist provides a divinely inspired commentary on his life:

... [Jehovah] sent a man before them—Joseph, sold as a slave.¹⁸They bruised his feet with shackles, his neck was put in irons, ¹⁹until what he foretold came to pass, until the word of Jehovah had tested him. ²⁰The king sent and released him, the ruler of the peoples set him free. ²¹He made him master of his household, ruler over all he possessed. (Psl. 105:17-21)

The LORD was testing Joseph to see if he was worthy of the promised honor—the honor made known to him early in his life, note Genesis 37:5-8,

Now Joseph had a dream, and he told it to his brothers ... ⁶He said to them, "I beg you, listen to this dream that I dreamed: ⁷we were binding sheaves of grain out in the field, and my sheaf rose up and stood upright. Your sheaves came and bowed down to my sheaf." ⁸His brothers said to him, "Shall you, indeed, reign over us? Or shall you, indeed, have dominion over us?" (Gen. 37:5-8a)

By means of the trials he suffered, the LORD was preparing Joseph to properly occupy the position of honor and responsibility to which He had previously called him.

The point of this proverb is that we must recognize and accept the LORD's way to true honor: *"humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, so that he may exalt you at the appointed time"* (1 Pet. 5:6.)

Conclusion

Proverbs instructs us that pride is an attitude to avoid, because it produces contention, it leads to shame, and it results in divine judgment.

The best way to avoid the sinful and destructive attitude of pride is to cultivate and practice the alternative: 1) do not associate with proud men, avoid them at all costs, so as not to assimilate their spirit; 2) do not honor yourself, let someone else confer honor upon you, and when they do, receive it with a gratitude that recognizes God as the Source of every good gift; 3) do not think that you know it all; have a teachable spirit that looks to the Word of God for instruction; 4) do not assume that you are in control of your life, recognize that your life is in God's hands; and 5) recognize and accept the LORD's way to true honor.