
FROM ABOVE | The Wisdom of Humility

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Today we're picking up on Part 5 of our series, FROM ABOVE, where we've been differentiating between earthly Wisdom and heavenly wisdom. Wisdom is "having a deep understanding of how the world really works, how relationships work, understanding life, and knowing how to navigate it."

One of the things that's frustrating for us as Americans is we want instructions. We want a "how-to" guide on Wisdom. But what we've discovered is that Wisdom is much less about a *thing that you do* than it is about the *kind of person you are*.

In other words, the scriptures say, "Become this kind of person, and then you'll be the type of person that makes wise decisions." **Wisdom is less about behavior than it is about character.** *And if you have a certain kind of character, you'll exhibit wise behavior.*

And today we're going to go after what Proverbs puts forward as the most prominent and important characteristics of a BIBLICALLY-WISE person. It's something that the Church needs — and something we're not seeing very much of in our world lately.

HUMILITY

Proverbs is constantly *contrasting humility and pride*. We live in a culture where humility is often overlooked, and pride is regularly celebrated!

But pride doesn't just exist externally — it is an internal predator that seeks to devour your whole life.

THE PERVASIVENESS OF PRIDE THE WISDOM OF HUMILITY THE SUBVERSION OF PRIDE

THE PERVASIVENESS OF PRIDE

There are many verses and illustrations of pride and the destruction it brings throughout the Bible. This isn't a secondary, or tertiary issue in the Christian's life — it is a CENTRAL issue — a core issue in the life of every single believer.

The passage that gives us the clearest and most comprehensive understanding of what Pride is, is at the very beginning — Adam and Eve in the Garden.

They are in perfect, harmonious, unhindered relationship with God, with each other, and with the rest of Creation, and the Serpent slithers up next to Eve and deceives her. Both Adam and Eve have some level of desire or aspiration to be *greater* than they were — *to be something more than what God created and intended them to be* — to trust in themselves, their own understanding. As a result, they rebelled against God, and sought to elevate themselves to Godhood.

Genesis 3:6

...the woman saw that *“the forbidden tree was to be desired to make one wise...”*

- pride on one level is **thinking more highly of yourself than you should**
- it's **aspiring to be something more than God has created you to be**

But what's fascinating is what happened as a result of Adam and Eve's sin.

Before they ate the fruit it says that they were naked, and unashamed.

The very **moment** they ate the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, what happened?

Genesis 3:7

Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked...

- what does that mean? Their eyes were opened? Were they not opened before?
- what does that mean that they realized they were naked? Did they not know before?
- they went from being oblivious, unashamed of their nakedness, of their vulnerabilities
- to being painfully, shamefully, horrifyingly aware of their nakedness in an instant
- and they hid...

*Adam & Eve desired to become something **far greater** than they were created to be;
because they thought **too lowly** about who they were created to be;
because of it, they became something **far less** than they were created to be.*

This is the very same journey of Lucifer Himself. He desired to be God and ended up becoming something far less than an angel — and he took 1/3 of the angels with him!!!

All of this tells us something incredibly profound about pride...

**Pride is not just thinking too highly of yourself,
it's also not thinking too lowly of yourself.**

Pride is self-exaltation & self-pity.
Self-aggrandizement, and self-loathing.
They're two sides of the same coin.

“Pride is ruthless, sleepless, unsmiling concentration on the self.”¹
~ C. S. Lewis

In the end, at its root, Pride is a relentless, never-ending, irritable obsession with self.

This is why Proverbs is full of verses like...

Proverbs 16:5, 18

⁵ Everyone who is **arrogant in heart** is an abomination to the Lord; ¹⁸ **Pride** goes before destruction, and a **haughty spirit** before a fall.

¹ Lewis, C.S. *The Screwtape Letters: Annotated Edition* (HarperOne, 2013)

Proverbs 11:2

When pride comes, then comes disgrace...

St. Augustine and Thomas Aquinas both taught that pride is “the very essence of sin.”

“Pride is the head, life, and very nature of ALL sin.”^z
~ Martin Luther

**Behind every sinful action or attitude is pride —
self-obsession and self-absorption.**

One of the primary ways pride manifests itself is through comparison. We are constantly measuring ourselves against other people. We feel good if we’re “doing better” than other people, and we “feel bad” if other people are doing “better” than us.

For that reason, ***there’s no real joy in life*** — only the joy of being able to look down on someone else.

“Pride gets no pleasure out of having something,
only out of having more of it than the next man...”³
~ C.S. Lewis

This is what’s so dangerous about social media — it takes us out of the present moment where God wants to meet with us — and invites us into a whirlwind of comparison and self-absorption.

THE WISDOM OF HUMILITY

If thinking too highly or too lowly of yourself are both the result of pride — *then what is humility?* There are two elements of it.

**Humility is not thinking too lowly or too highly of yourself —
but thinking of yourself accurately.**

Look at Jesus... some of the things He said, at first glance sound arrogant! “*I’m the light of the world, I’m the only way to the Father, I’m the bread of life, I’m the Resurrection and the life...*” It feels very self-promotional, doesn’t it? When He said, “Before Abraham was, I AM” I existed before Abraham was ever born! Was that arrogance? When He said, “I and the Father are ONE...”

The better question to those comments are, *is it true?*
And if it’s true, *why was Jesus saying those things?*

Here’s the 2nd element of humility.

Jesus wasn’t make these outlandish claims about Himself for His own sake, He was saying them for our sake.

^z Luther, Martin. *Martin Luther Premium Collection* (e-artnow, 2018)

³ Lewis, C.S. *Complete Works of C.S. Lewis. Illustrated* (Strelbystskyy Multimedia Publishing, 2020)

What this tells us about humility is that it is accurately self-aware, but it's not self-absorbed.
If pride is self-exaltation or self-loathing — both are rooted in self-absorption.

**Humility has an accurate view of self
and is other-focused.**

Jesus, wasn't thinking of himself too highly and he never thought too lowly of himself either.

Jesus viewed Himself, and stated with absolute precision, confidence, and humility, exactly who He was, without exaggeration, diminishment, or error — and everything He did was for the sake of others.

It's only when you're living in humility, that you're going to look like Jesus.

***You're going to be able to admit faults without fear.
AND you'll be able to admit your strengths without being self-conscious.***

**Humility is self-awareness without self-absorption —
it's others-focused without self-abdication.**

Look at the promises of God toward the humble person...

Proverbs 11:2

When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the **humble is wisdom.**

- You want to be wise? Become humble.

Proverbs 15:33

The fear of the LORD teaches a man wisdom, and **humility comes before honor.**

- That word Honor carries the meaning of supreme glory!
- It's the reversal of the way this world operates. Jesus even said it.

Luke 14:11

For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.

The New Testament book of wisdom...

James 4:6

God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.

Is anyone interested in having the favor of heaven on your life?

Anyone want to live a life that God honors?

To live a life that is saturated by the grace of God?

Anyone interested in being blessed with wisdom from heaven?

Humble yourself. Don't think too highly — and don't think too lowly — view yourself accurately.

How in the world do you do that?

Two ways.... one very practical... one conceptual... both spiritual.

FIRST — nuts and bolts practical way to grow in humility

Proverbs 13:10

Pride only breeds quarrels, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

- The humble person is able to be corrected without becoming offended! Are you easily offended?
- Do you fly off the handle at people who say the wrong thing to you? Pride is at work.
- It's the humble person that can take correction without being crushed by it.

Proverbs 15:31-32

The ear that listens to life-giving reproof will dwell among the wise.³² Whoever ignores instruction despises himself, but he who listens to reproof gains intelligence.

THE SUBVERSION OF PRIDE

This is where Christianity offers something that no other major world religion even comes close to.

In all other world religions, we're told, *"If you want to be saved, you have to perform the truth, you have to adhere to the tenants of that faith, and if you do, God will bless you; and if you don't, God will reject you unless you do something to get back into His good graces... OR you'll be reincarnated as a bug, or you won't achieve Nirvana."*

It's all about your ability to perform.

Every other religion says, "Those that are able to perform, those that keep the five pillars of Islam, those who practice the seven branches of Buddhism — those who have the knowledge and the ability — those that can perform are in, and those that can't are out. The good people are in, and the bad people are out. The ones who obey are in — and the ones who don't are out."

BUT ONLY JESUS says "The only way in, the only way through that door, is to come to the conclusion that you can't make it in. All your effort, all your striving, all your strength, all your determination won't get you anywhere. Your only way in is to admit that you can't get in on your own."

This sets Jesus Christ apart from every religious leader, every revolutionary. This sets Christianity apart from every other religion — because it's not "the good are in and the bad are out" — it's, **"the humble are in and the proud are out."**

"Pride must die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you."⁴

~ Andrew Murray

CONCLUSION

We had two questions come in for our Wednesday Q & A on Facebook live...

**Do you have any advice for those that get stuck in self-pity?
Any advice for those that get stuck in self-righteousness?**

***Both Pride issues... and the answer is the same for both.
The answer is the gospel.***

⁴ Murray, Andrew. *Humility: The Beauty of Holiness* (Nisbet, 2008)

For the Self-righteous... prideful. You've got to remember the gospel in this way, *"No matter how great I think I am... the gospel tells me that my sin is so heinous, so evil, so destructive, so repulsive, that God literally came and died in my place for my sin. It doesn't matter my position, my status in this life... it doesn't matter how smart I think I am... without Jesus Christ, I'm doomed for eternity and it's only because of Him, that I am what I am, and I have what I have. Therefore, every waking moment I will seek to glorify HIM, not myself. Because He's worthy of it, and I'm not."*

For the person stuck in self-pity. You've got to preach the gospel to yourself in this way, *"The Almighty God of heaven, broke in on humanity, and gave His life to prove His magnificent love to ME! Of all people, ME! That He who knew no sin, became sin for ME! So that I might become the righteousness of God! He loves me that much! He sees me, He knows my name, He says I'm the head not the tail. I'm the righteousness of Christ, and no matter how I feel, nothing is ever going to change my standing with Him as His son or daughter! And I am chosen, I'm treasured, I'm loved, I'm cared for. I'm not alone. He's with me, even to the end of the age."*

- **The gospel subverts self-pity, AND self-righteousness.**
- **The gospel levels the playing field of humanity and enables you to view yourself accurately.**
- **Because the gospel says that you and I are more stained with sin that we'd ever want to admit.**
- **But we are more cherished and loved that we could ever possibly fathom.**

Discussion Questions

1. Is wisdom more about behavior or about character?
2. How can pride be both self-exaltation *and* self-pity?
3. Why is comparison the thief of joy?
4. Discuss: humility has an accurate view of self, and is other-focused.
5. How is Christianity different than any other religion?

NOTES