

Pride

Sin is described in Scripture, not only as a transgression of God's law (1 John 3:4), but also as a falling short of God's glory (Rom 3:23). This fact is critical to understanding why the problem of sin is so serious. When Adam and Eve sinned in Genesis 3, their sin was not just about eating a piece of fruit, but about violating the very nature and glory of God. They were setting themselves up on their own throne, dethroning God in their hearts, and deciding that they could essentially be their own gods. At the root of their sin—at the root of all sin—is pride, and that pride manifests itself in various ways. God hates “haughty eyes” (Prov 6:16-17), so being proud of what is sinful is no virtue. The “boastful pride of life” is set alongside the lust of the flesh and lust of the eyes, and is of the world (1 John 2:15-17). It proceeds from within the heart and defiles the person (Mark 7:22-23). How does it manifest itself and why is it so destructive?

Self-Exaltation

Pride is the sin of setting ourselves up over others, deciding that we are more important than others, and thus able to decide for ourselves what is right or wrong (cf. Gen 3:5). In relation to God, pride is the setting up of self over God's will, putting our own will and desires above His. This is why pride is at the core of all sin, for all sin puts self above God and His will.

This mentality is seen in the contrasts made in Scripture with humility, showing that pride is a form of self-exaltation. This same principle is expressed a number of times in a variety of contexts: “Whoever exalts himself shall be humbled; and whoever humbles himself shall be exalted” (Matt 23:12). “A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor” (Prov 29:23). “The proud look of man will be abased and the loftiness of man will be humbled, and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day” (Isa. 2:11). Passages like these show that pride and humility are at opposite ends of the spectrum, and God will have the final say as to who is humbled and who is exalted.

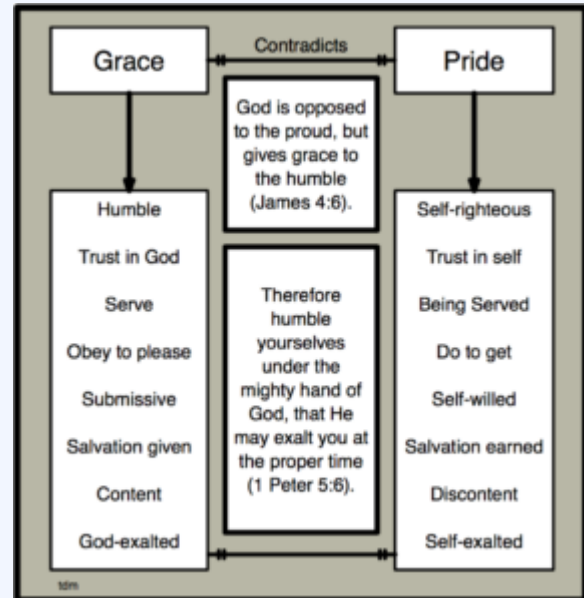
Pride is the exalting of self, and this is at the heart of self-righteousness. Self-exaltation will result in looking at God and others with a sense of contempt. This is seen in the parable of the two men who went up to the temple to pray (Luke 18:9-18). The Pharisee exemplified those who “trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and viewed others with contempt” (v. 9). The pride of the Pharisee set over against the humility of the tax-collector is evident as the parable ends with the same familiar statement: “for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but he who humbles himself will be exalted.”

Self-righteousness is a form of arrogance, and anyone who doesn't measure up to one's personal, exalted standard will be held in contempt. Humility, on the other hand, recognizes God's righteous

standard, personal failure to measure up against that standard, and a desire for mercy and grace. This is why the tax collector went home justified. He begged for God’s mercy instead of boasting in personal accomplishments.

Contradictory to Grace

Grace is for the humble who submit to God, not the proud who are self-righteous. Peter writes, “all of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, for God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble. Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you at the proper time, casting all your anxiety on Him, because He cares for you” (1 Pet 5:5-7).



James, also, makes the same point: “But He gives a greater grace. Therefore it says, ‘God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.’ Submit therefore to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you. Cleanse your hands, you sinners; and purify your hearts, you double-minded. Be miserable and mourn and weep; let your laughter be turned into mourning and your joy to gloom. Humble yourselves in the presence of the Lord, and He will exalt you (James 4:6-10).

It takes humility to submit to God, to resist the devil, to draw near to God. It is here, in that humility, where grace will be found. Pride is contradictory to grace. It puts one in a position of resisting God rather than the devil. The proud cannot draw near to God, for He will only know them from afar: “For though the Lord is exalted, yet He regards the lowly, but the haughty He knows from afar” (Psalm 138:6).

When Stephen faced the self-righteous council, he called them “stiff-necked and uncircumcised in heart and ears” because they “always resist the Holy Spirit” (Acts 7:51). This concept of being “stiff-necked” or “hard-hearted” is another way of speaking of pride. It is an attitude that leaves one with a futile mind, a darkened understanding, ignorant, and excluded from the life of God (cf. Eph 4:17-19).

Scripture elsewhere testifies, “When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is

wisdom" (Prov 11:2). Wisdom will recognize the inherent danger that attends pride: "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before stumbling. It is better to be humble in spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Prov 16:18-19).

The only way to grace is through humility, and humility does not happen accidentally. We must decide actively to humble ourselves in God's presence. Pride is the enemy that will consume and destroy us because pride will deny grace.

What Does God Really Want?

The proud will have great difficulty understanding what God really wants. Micah dealt with an obstinate people who wondered if what God wanted was more sacrificing or sacrifices that were more costly. His response was both simple and profound: "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8)

Walking humbly with God means that we will seek to do His will over ours. Cold ritual will never suffice. David, in his deep grief over his own sins, understood this: "The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; a broken and a contrite heart, O God, You will not despise." (Psalm 51:17). It's not that God didn't want sacrifices at all—He did command them—but that what must come first is humility, being poor in spirit (cf. Matt. 5:3). Only then will we be able to seek God properly.

What God wants from us is to take on the mind of Christ:

"Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus..." (Phil 2:3-5).

Deny self (Luke 9:23). The old man with all the pride is dead and needs to be kept down (Col 3:5-10). The new man is characterized by humility, according to the image of Him who created us. Through humility let us draw near to God and receive His grace.

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