

Pride and Humility

Various Proverbs

The English language is always evolving,
 and from time to time we have new words that enter into our dictionaries
 One word which is a more recent invention is *humblebrag*
 Can you guess what a *humblebrag* is?
 It's a comment that tries to sound humble and self-deprecating,
 but is actually quite boastful, it's actually a form of bragging.

It's the kind of comment that we'll read each year
 in the Christmas letters that our friends send us.
We've spent a terrible amount of time in our lawyer's office this year
 (that's the humble bit),
simply to sort out the details involved in buying our new beach house!
 (that's the brag!)
We're enjoying the rest over the holidays
because we're completely worn out by all the travel
we've been doing over the last year!

I'm sure you've all heard
 or perhaps even uttered your own *humblebrags* over the years.
 The age of the internet has meant
humblebrags have now reached pandemic proportions
 Twitter has great examples:



So that's the *humblebrag*. It's a good word, isn't it?
 It sums up really neatly an action that we're very familiar with.
 But even though *humblebrag* is a new word, it's describing an old problem:
 the problem of human pride.

This is the final week in our four-week series in the Book of Proverbs,
 and we've been looking at those Proverbs which describe our *inner life*
 We've discussed how our inner life can be a place of great suffering,
 We've spoken about how anger can brew on the inside
 Last week we considered our inner desires; our loves and hates,
 This week's topic is the puffed-up inner life;
 the proud and arrogant inner man or woman
 who has an over-inflated view of themselves.

We don't have to be a Donald-trump like figure to have a problem with this.
 Our pride may be restricted to one or two topics,
 one or two aspects of life,
 maybe its triggered by one or two people.
 But pride is a human reality and, as we'll see first,
 it's a reality we can't ignore.

Last week when we were speaking about love and hate
 we discovered that the God we worship is not only a God of love,
 but he is also capable of hatred.
 God hates sin, and the sin of pride is included!
 Take a look at 16:5 The LORD detests all the proud of heart.
 Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished.
 I think we can comprehend the fact that God detests the big sins:
 He detests murder, he detests corrupt governments,
 but the Scriptures tell us he also detests all the proud of heart.
 They will not go unpunished we're told.
 Pride can be such a subtle thing,
 it can be hidden away in the secret recesses of our hearts,
 yet God sees it, and he *hates* it!

One of the reasons he hates it is that, like anger, pride is a gateway to other sins
 21:4 Haughty eyes and a proud heart—
 the unplowed field of the wicked—produce sin
 Allow pride to grow unchecked within you
 and you'll soon start sinning in other ways.
 Pride may lead you to become angry when your ideas become challenged.
 Pride may drive you towards lofty goals,
 —maybe for your family, maybe for your workplace—
 and those goals may mean you place unjust expectations upon others.
 Pride can lead to greed and theft and corruption.

There's been a story in the United States recently
 about corruption in the university admissions process.
 Some b-list celebrities have been accused of paying people off
 to ensure their children are offered places in the top universities.
 Lori Loughlin from the 1980s sitcom *Full House*,
 and Felicity Huffman from the 2000s drama *Desperate Housewives*
 were both charged with fraud.

What's the motivation behind a crime like that?
 Pride has to play a part, doesn't it? The pride of attending the right school,
 of having the best opportunity to ensure the best position in life.
 Well, that pride has ended in great public shame for these people,
 which is what Proverbs warns us will happen:
 11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

And again in 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.
That one is probably the most quoted proverb of them all:
pride goes before a fall.

Most people probably think they're quoting Shakespeare
but it's from the Bible.

Unchecked pride will lead to an error of judgment somewhere along the line,
and if that error is made public then not only will you be in trouble with God
but you'll also be in trouble with others.

I think of all the sins we commit,
pride is the one which demonstrates our dire need for Jesus.
Because who among us isn't affected with pride?
Who hasn't ever found themselves boasting?
Who hasn't ever been a little bit dishonest about their lives
in order to impress others?
(it would be funny if you put your hand up at this point, wouldn't it,
I'm not proud, and I'm proud to say so!)
This is something deep within all of us,
and so it means that each one of us in desperate need of the grace of God,
the grace which is ours through the blood of Christ shed on the cross,
a grace which forgives proud hearts no matter how big or how small.
Yes, God hates pride,
but he also forgives the proud and offers them a new start.

Before we look at what that new start might look like, it's worth
addressing a question that some people might be asking.
We live in an age which values high self-esteem,
and we have all witnessed the damage that can be inflicted
by low self-esteem,
and sometimes we use the word *pride*
to describe the positive self-image that we want people to have.
In fact, the word *pride* is now used so often in a positive sense,
that we've had to invent a new word to describe negative pride.
If someone has big ego we no longer say they are *proud*,
we say they are *prideful*
Our English Bibles are yet to make this shift,
but maybe that's a change that will occur.

Are we saying that thinking positively about yourself is a sinful thing?
Well, not always.
I think this is where our New Testament passage can be a helpful.
When Paul speaks about our self-image, the phrase he uses is *sober judgment*.
Romans 12:3 For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself
more highly than you ought—in other words, “don't be too proud”, or “prideful”—
but rather think of yourself with *sober judgment*, in accordance with the faith God has
distributed to each of you.

What Paul wants to see is not *high* self-esteem or *low* self-esteem,
 he just wants a truthful self-assessment,
 a self-assessment which is *sober*, unaffected by either pride or self-loathing.

And if we have a sober judgment of ourselves,
 then we'll admit that there are some things about us that are pretty terrible,
 but there are other things that are pretty terrific!
 In fact, Paul goes on to say that grace has been given to each one of us,
 a grace that manifests itself in various abilities that can benefit others.
 So this is the Christian approach to how we view ourselves,
 yeah we're sinners, but in his grace God has made us with a lot to offer.

To me this appears to be the right way to go about raising the next generation.
 I think it's cruel—and theologically incorrect—to say to a child
 “you can do anything”. No they can't! God hasn't made us that way.
 We can do some things, but not all things.

Maybe that's another reason God hates pride so much,
 when we think we can be or should be *the greatest*,
 then it's a denial of how God has made us as humans.
 We're not designed to be perfect, were designed to be good at some things,
 and to be a gift for one another with our own abilities.
 That's the way it works in the church: Romans 3:14 For just as each of us has one
 body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, ⁵ so in
 Christ we, though many, form one body, and each member belongs to all the others. ⁶ We
 have different gifts, according to the grace given to each of us.

We had a church Warden's meeting last week
 and the wardens are talking about computer servers and clouds,
 and I'm looking at the window thinking, it looks fine to me, clouds?
 What are they talking about? Not my area of expertise!
 I can teach, but there's lots I can't do!
 Part of our Christian development is to work out our own contribution,
 And to do so with sober judgment!

And so as we head back to the book of Proverbs
 we see that this idea of working together
 is a major key in fighting pride and pursuing humility.
 Wisdom would have us look beyond ourselves to others.
 Those who trust in themselves are fools, we're told in ch 28 v26
 12:15 The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.
 It is a foolish thing to make yourself your own authoritative reference point.
 What is true in the church is also true in the rest of life,
 you've got to bring others into the conversation:
 seek advice, listen to what others have experienced.
 13:10 Where there is strife, there is pride, but wisdom is found in those who take advice.

15:22 Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with many advisers they succeed.
 24:6 Surely you need guidance to wage war, and victory is won through many advisers.
 If there's one arena where the folly of not listening has been made clear,
 then it's got to be in the way some generals have waged war.

A week and a half ago we celebrated ANZAC Day,
 Both my Grandfathers served in WWI, and my Great-uncle Leo,
 the brother of one of my grandfathers,
 he was killed during the attack at Fromelles on the 19th July 1916.
 This was a terrible night in Australian history,
 over 5000 Australians were killed in one evening.

And the attack should have never taken place.
 The Australians were hopelessly under-prepared,
 there are stories of officers being sent into battle
 without maps to know where to go.
 The enemy had well established machine gun positions
 which just cut down almost everyone who went over the top.
 There was an Australian officer, Pompey Elliot, who,
 when he saw the conditions, sent word back to Douglas Haig,
 the British commander, saying "this is crazy, you've got to call it off".
 But the order came, and over they went, only to be immediately cut down.

The next year Douglas Haig did the same thing at Passchendaele, another massacre,
 And the story goes that when Douglas Haig's chief of staff
 finally paid a visit to the front, he saw all the mud and he said to his driver
 "Don't tell me we send them out in this?"
 And the driver said "It gets worse further on up".

Some people defend Douglas Haig, they say, "Well, he won the war!"
 But perhaps the victory didn't have to be so expensive.
 His problem was that he didn't take advice,
 and he insisted on his own outdated strategies.
 Even after the war he refused to change his opinions
 This is what he said in 1926: *I believe that the value of the horse and the
 opportunity for the horse in the future are likely to be as great as ever.
 Aeroplanes and tanks are only accessories to the men and the horse, and I feel
 sure that as time goes on you will find just as much use for the horse—the well-
 bred horse—as you have ever done in the past.*

I mean, that's just ridiculous, isn't it? Horses over aeroplanes and tanks?
 Surely there's some pride there that's clouding his opinions?
 Pride about the methods that he was trained in,
 pride that elevates his own beliefs even though they've been proven wrong
 Pride can be very expensive,
 so it pays to find some humility and to seek out the opinions of others.

And if we do end up with some success, then let other people do the praising!

27:2 Let someone else praise you, and not your own mouth;
an outsider, and not your own lips.

It's a hard thing not to blow your own trumpet, isn't it?

Even among ministers there's a lot of self-promoting happening.

Here's an article I wrote, I just hope people find it helpful.

Sometimes its not even dressed up as a humblebrag,

it's just blatant self promotion: *Here's the book I wrote, you can buy it here!*

Let other people do the promoting.

God's in charge, if he wants us to have success then he'll bring it.

If praise and success do come, then watch out, cause that will test you!

27:21 The crucible for silver and the furnace for gold, but people are tested by their praise.

You strengthen metal by sticking it in a furnace,

by exposing it to something that can melt it or refine it.

And praise can go two ways with us, cant it? It can feed our ego,

or we can pass the test and not let it get to our heads.

They make an interesting pair these two proverbs:

Let others praise you, but don't believe too much of it.

Finding some humility is worth it because not only will we avoid costly mistakes
but we will win the favour of other people.

13:18 Whoever disregards discipline comes to poverty and shame,
but whoever heeds correction is honored.

29:23 Pride brings a person low, but the lowly in spirit gain honor.

One of the great drivers of pride is our desire to be well thought of by others,
but the Bible tells us that in actual fact, humility is the path to honour.

Maybe that honour will be a long time coming,

maybe the path of humility will be a difficult one,

but it's the best path to take if we wish to be honored in the end.

This was Christ's experience, he chose humility, and God honored him,
and here we are honoring him today. So why don't we imitate him?

I'll leave you with these words from Philippians 2

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death— even death on a cross! Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Let's pray.