

PROVERBS: THE WAY OF WISDOM

PRIDE & HUMILITY

Before destruction a man's heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor. — Proverbs 18:12

Read: Proverbs 15:25-33

Throughout history, Christians have recognized the unique place that the sin of pride plays in our lives. In the fourth century, Augustine called pride “the beginning of sin.” It is the sin that leads to all other sins. Over a thousand years later, C. S. Lewis called pride the utmost evil, a spiritual cancer, and the “anti-God state of mind.” Pride, in its very nature, exalts the self. But that doesn’t mean it’s always flashy and overt. Oftentimes, pride is quiet and subtle, wrapped in phrases like “stay true to yourself” or “just follow your heart.” In essence, pride could be summarized as becoming “wise in our own eyes.” We decide for ourselves what is right and wrong, what is wise and foolish. As a result, pride stops up our ears from hearing the voice of Lady Wisdom.

Humility, on the other hand, doesn’t look inside for answers. The humble stand ready to receive from God, recognizing their absolute need for another to impart the wisdom they desperately need. The humble don’t seek to lower themselves into greatness, like some kind of monk or sage in the wilderness. Rather, humility is about self-forgetfulness. In humility, we take our eyes off ourselves and place them on the source of all Wisdom.

In the book of Proverbs, pride and humility are nearly synonymous with the concepts of folly and wisdom. There is a sense in which this entire book is a warning against the folly of pride and an exhortation toward the wisdom of humility. All throughout Scripture, God makes it abundantly clear how he feels about pride and humility. God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble (James 4:6). He brings the proud down from their self-made thrones, but exalts the humble and blesses them with good things (Luke 1:51-53). The Lord, who reigns exalted above all in the highest heaven, has his eyes resolutely transfixed on the one who is lowly and contrite in spirit (Isaiah 66:1-2). Or, as Jesus put it in the Sermon on the Mount, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”

Discussion/Reflection

We want to apply God’s wisdom to transform how we think, feel, and act. The following questions are meant to stimulate conversation, correction, and change.

1. **Why do you think Christians have historically considered pride to be the worst of all sins? What are some examples of how pride is the root that leads to other sins?**
2. **Where do you recognize pride in your own life? In other words, where might you be “wise in your own eyes”?** Where do you resist asking for help? Where do you resist receiving help when it’s offered? Where do you fail to acknowledge your need?
3. **Read Philippians 2:1-11.** How does seeing Jesus rightly lead us closer toward humility? What steps could we take to be a more humble people?