

Pride and Humility

Luke 18:9-14

He also told this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt: 10 “Two men went up into the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee, standing by himself, prayed thus: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I get.’ 13 But the tax collector, standing far off, would not even lift up his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, ‘God, be merciful to me, a sinner!’ 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified, rather than the other. For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.”

- The great theologian and bible teacher, R.C. Sproul, said that this parable is probably the most important parable Jesus ever told. He said it's so important that we would be ill-advised to take it lightly.
- Sproul talked about being involved in a door-to-door evangelistic effort during the 1970s called Evangelism Explosion. His team kept meticulous records and classified people's responses to the questions they asked as part of the script they used.
- Approximately 90% of the people when asked “How do you know you are going to heaven?” gave a works-based answer. In other words, these folks believed the “good” things, the good works, that they did qualified them for eternal life.
- In recent online and telephone polls conducted by groups like Lifeway, Barna, and Gallup the number of people who believe this is at least 50%...a lot of the variation depends on how the question about gaining eternal life is asked. Still a concern.
- In this parable, the Pharisee listed all his good works before God like it was his pedigree. In his eyes, his ticket to God's favor was punched. He had earned it.
- Notice that, in verse 14, Jesus focused on the question of justification. “How can I be made right with God?” A justified person is a person who is made just or righteous in the eyes of God. Interestingly, it was the repentant tax collector who went away justified, but the Pharisee did not.
- It's important to realize that if the Pharisee's list was accurate, he was outwardly an upstanding person. He didn't cheat people out of their money, he probably had memorized the complete text of the law, he didn't mess around with other men's wives, he fasted, he tithed, and he obviously attended church.

- Jesus identified the Pharisee’s problem as twofold: he trusted in his own righteousness, and he viewed others with contempt. He got it right, but others, in his eyes, got it wrong.
- Jesus built a “Catch 22” in this parable. It is a glorious example of a teaching by our Lord that is always applicable, always instructive, and perpetually able to convict our consciences at deeper levels if we allow it.
- I suspect that, for most of us, when we read about the Pharisee and the tax collector, we say to ourselves ‘I’m not like that Pharisee. I don’t judge others, and I don’t treat others with contempt. I’m not prideful like that.’
- But do you see the contradiction here? Isn’t that the same basic attitude the Pharisee demonstrated? Aren’t we patting ourselves on the back and justifying ourselves like he did? We say, “I thank you, Lord, I’m not like that Pharisee!”
- Jesus would not have told this parable if it didn’t have wider application than just pointing out how arrogant the Pharisees were.
- Our own inward thoughts are like silent Pharisees. In our minds we are constantly defending ourselves; always comparing ourselves to others. Always making a determination about why we are “right.” Then we judge others based on the plumbline we’ve created.
- This is called pride. **Pride is at the root of every sin.** And God hates pride.
- The promise in verse 14 is that everyone who pridefully exalts him or herself will be humbled. Whether in this life or in the next, our self-justification will run head on into the holiness of the sovereign God.
- Notice that word “everyone.” I looked up the Greek for that word “everyone” and I discovered that it means “everyone.” Saved, unsaved, rich, poor, male, female, red, yellow, black or white, Jew or Greek, slave or free, politician or poll worker.
- God will have varying purposes in humbling believers vs. nonbelievers, but the promise remains the same...if you pridefully exalt yourself, eventually you will face some kind of humbling.
- For believers, our Lord is at work in us to sanctify us, to make us more holy.
- The writer of the book of Hebrews makes the case that God “**disciplines us for our good, that we may share in His holiness**” (Hebrews 12:10).
- This process of sanctification primarily involves dealing with our pride on one hand while working humility in us on the other. It’s a two-sided coin.
- It’s my will vs. God’s will. That’s essentially the message of the entire Bible, Genesis to Revelation. Open your Bible randomly, plunk your finger down, read that verse and the surrounding context, and you will discover...it’s about our will as sinful humans vs. God’s will as the holy sovereign creator.

- If you are like me, you could tell some stories about when God held true to this promise to keep us humble. I've got quite a few, like these:
 - I'm an elementary/middle school educator by trade. It was the end of my 10th year of teaching. I had quite a bit of success as an educator, and I was starting to think a little more highly of myself than I ought to think. So, the next school year God gave me the 6th grade class that put me on my face before the Lord for entire year. So many discipline problems and issues. The school counselor told me that a full 1/3 of those kids needed "serious psychological counseling." I honestly thought I was going to die before that year was over. I learned I wasn't quite the accomplished educator I judged myself to be.
 - Our family was into flying. I learned to fly in high school and had a pilot's license. A number of years later, we purchased and spent a year refurbishing an old Cessna 120 in my dad's garage. That project consumed me! The plane was a taildragger, but I had learned to fly in tricycle gear airplanes. I thought it was no big deal. I was a trained pilot! The first day I flew it on my own I almost had a midair collision (not my fault) and, only a couple minutes later, I ground-looped the airplane while landing and smashed one wingtip into the ground (definitely my fault).
 - Donna and I went into debt to buy a big, new travel trailer. We just HAD to have that camper!! On our first camping trip, before even getting off our property, I pulled it out of the driveway and hit a tree limb which substantially damaged the roof of the camper.
- Those situations and dozens of others over the years literally put me on my knees, crying out to God for mercy.
- Am I the only one who has had experiences like these? Can I get a witness? I'm not making a case that it's wrong to experience a certain level of confidence in your occupation or flying skills, nor is it necessarily wrong to buy a camper. But God will use these kinds of situations to humble us for His purposes. Let's talk about it.

Pride and humility and the glory of God

- Solomon, James, and Peter all tell us that ***"God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."*** (Proverbs 3:34; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5)
- Why is God so opposed to pride? Why does He value humility so much? These are the questions I'd like to explore with you. But, if you remember nothing else from my little talk today, remember the verse I just quoted: ***"God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble."***
- Let's look at Isaiah 66, verses 1 and 2:

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool; what is the house that you would build for me, and what is the place of my rest? 2 All these things my hand has made, and so all these things came to be, declares the LORD. But this is the one to whom I will look: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word.

- We must be grounded in this truth: God is the absolute source and center of all things. When nothing existed, there was our triune God who exists eternally in three persons: the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Before there was gravity, there was God. Before there was light there was God.
- The three persons of the Trinity were a perfect unity communing in pure love.
- As God says in this passage ***"All these things my hand has made, so all these things came to be."***
- With Heaven as His throne and the earth as His footstool, we can add nothing to Him. Life is a dualism: God the Creator waaaaay over there, and we as part of His creation an infinity over there. So, our feeble efforts to put him in a neat little box or to second guess His decisions or to earn His favor by our own efforts are an exercise in prideful futility.
- Allow me to go even further, and this is something we must get our heads around. The reason God created the universe was to bring glory to Himself. Theologians who operate on a much higher academic and theological plane than I have all come to this same conclusion. God says, in ***Isaiah 42:8, "I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other."***
- But we should not think of God as some self-absorbed, power-hungry, and vain being who demands our unwilling loyalty because he thrives on it. Quite the opposite.
- It is by bowing our knee and worshipping this infinitely glorious Creator in all His perfections that we find our greatest joy and fulfillment. As John Piper puts it: "God is supremely committed to the display of His glory for the admiration and enjoyment for all who will have it as their supreme treasure."
- To put it simply: God created the world as a stage to display the full panorama of His perfections, and by acknowledging this through our worship we experience joy to the highest extremes possible.
- C.S. Lewis, as a new convert when reading the Psalms, was originally put off by the commands to praise God because God seemed to him like "a vain woman who wants compliments." But after looking considering it more deeply, Lewis came to this life-changing realization. I'm quoting Lewis:

"But the most obvious fact about praise -- whether of God or anything -- strangely

escaped me. I thought of it in terms of compliment, approval, or the giving of honor. I had never noticed that all enjoyment spontaneously overflows into praise. ... The world rings with praise -- lovers praising their mistresses, readers their favorite poet, walkers praising the countryside, players praising their favorite game. ... I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation." ~ *Reflections on the Psalms*

- So, by humbling ourselves and giving God the glory that is due him, we find our highest joy and purpose. Nothing will make us happier.
- When we walk in pride, we are in danger of robbing God of the worship he is due and, instead, giving ourselves credit.

- To summarize what I've said so far:
 - God is opposed to the proud, but He gives grace to the humble.
 - Pride places ourselves as the center of the universe. Pride determines *it's* own plumbline of right and wrong. Pride refuses to acknowledge God as the only one worthy of glory, honor, and praise.
 - Proud people look upon others with contempt if they do not align to the correct standards.
 - The ultimate expression of pride is judging God and second guessing his actions and commands that are revealed in Scripture.
 - God promises that proud people will be humbled.

 - Humble people, on the other hand, tremble at God's word. They do not refuse God's discipline in their lives. They are contrite because of their sin. They seek to align themselves to Christ's example as revealed in scripture. They submit themselves to those in authority God has placed over them.
 - Humble people say "Not my will, but Thy will be done." As they mature in the faith, they take greater and greater joy in giving God all the glory that is due to Him.
 - And, above all, and most fundamentally, humble Christians realize that the only righteousness they possess that justifies them before God is the imputed righteousness that they receive from Jesus Christ who died in their place.

"For our sake he made him to be sin who knew no sin, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." 2 Corinthians 5:21

- The bread and the cup remind us of this.

Identifying Pride in Ourselves and Humbling Ourselves

- The promise Jesus made in our opening scripture was this: ***Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.*** Luke 18:14b
- Peter, in 1 Peter 5:6-7 says ***“Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, 7 casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.”***
- Humbling ourselves, then, is a good thing with a promise connected to it.
- In the big world out there, June has been proclaimed as Pride Month. Perhaps it would be appropriate, instead of celebrating pride, for God’s people to spend a month considering where pride may be a problem in our lives, and prayerfully asking the Holy Spirit to bring conviction where pride may have a foothold.
- In the sermon notes that we post to the MCC web page each week is a document that I found by a gentleman named Stuart Scott from his book *The Exemplary Husband*. He lists 30 “manifestations of pride” with this encouragement: “As we have said, pride is blinding. This fact is why it is often difficult to see pride in ourselves, and yet so easy to see it in others. Here is a sample list of pride manifestations that can easily clear away the smoke of any self-righteousness.”
- There are 30 days in June. I challenge each of us to, over the next 30 days, consider each of the manifestations listed, read the bible verse or verses associated with that manifestation, then prayerfully ask the Holy Spirit if this is a problem in your life. One per day.
- Resist the temptation to think more about other people than you do about yourself. As Stuart Scott says “It’s easier to see pride in others than it is in yourself.”
- Mr. Scott also lists 24 “manifestations of humility” with this encouragement: “A humble person lives differently than a proud one. How does your life measure up in the area of humility? Here is a sample list to help you evaluate how humble you are.”
- Reading over the list of the manifestations of humility will provide a positive counterbalance as you examine yourself.

Let’s pray...