

How Pride Poisons the Soul

The most important thing we need to understand about pride is that God hates it. Lest you think I should soften my language, consider these texts:

There are six things that the LORD hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers. (Prov. 6:16-19)

Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished. (Prov. 16:5)

Observe in Proverbs 16:5 that it is not merely arrogance itself that is an abomination to the Lord; the arrogant person is an abomination as well.

Of all that God hates, of all that is an abomination to him, what is first on the list? Haughty eyes, which is to say, prideful, arrogant eyes. Haughty eyes does not refer to how a person's eyes look to others but how a person views himself and others. He views them as less than himself, as essentially worthless. He is arrogant and puffed up with his own sense of value.

The word *hate* is an unpleasant one that we typically instruct our children to avoid. It's vicious, venomous, and destructive. When we experience "hatred" it usually means we loathe certain things, we seek to avoid them, we desire to destroy them, we speak ill of them, and we vote against them. We do everything possible to forget them. Hatred in the heart of God is righteous hatred, pure, unalloyed, unmitigated disgust and revulsion. For something to be an "abomination" to God means that it is a stench in his nostrils. Such is what God feels about pride: he hates it; it is an utter abomination.

Think about James 4:6—"God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." James doesn't say that God simply ignores the proud or avoids them or keeps his distance from them. No, he resists them. He works in open opposition to them. He wages war against them and thwarts them. Pride provokes God to wrath and indignation; it irritates him, agitates him, and displeases him beyond words.

Taproot of All Sin

Scripture also teaches that pride is a precursor to all other forms of sin. Pride is the soil in which all manner of sin germinates and grows. Consider Proverbs 16:18-19—“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoils with the proud.” I could multiply verses many times that say essentially the same thing about pride. First comes pride, then destruction of the proud person.

Is it an exaggeration to say that pride is the underlying cause of all sin? I don't think so. If you would take the time to excavate your sin, beneath it all you would discover the rotting bones of pride and arrogance. Numerous sins are the direct fallout of pride:

Envy. Envy is the resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, an advantage that you are convinced ought rightfully to be yours. But why should someone else's success or promotion or praise provoke envy in our hearts? Why not joy, instead? The answer is because we don't want others to appear better than ourselves; we are convinced that we are more worthy and more deserving of the advantage.

Bitterness. Bitterness is that sour feeling in our souls when someone has offended us or defrauded us or failed to deliver on what we thought they owed us. But why should that provoke bitterness? Because it makes us look bad in the eyes of others, or it deprives us of something we think we deserve.

Strife. Strife flows out of a competitive desire to be number one, the desire to be acknowledged by others, the desire for power and authority and praise.

Deceit. Why do we lie and mislead others and speak in fuzzy rather than forthright terms? Typically, it is because we hope to gain something for ourselves that we think we deserve, or we do it to hide something from others that we fear might make us look bad.

Hypocrisy. We are motivated to pretend to be something we are not because we fear being seen and known for what we really are.

Slander. Why do we speak negatively of others? Why do we slander them? Perhaps because we've been hurt ourselves, and we want revenge, or we want to gain acceptance with others, and the only way is to diminish them in the minds of those people whose favor or respect we must have.

Greed. Greed at its core is the desire to make more of and for ourselves than God wishes or permits. And pride is the poker that stokes the fires of materialism. We can't stand the thought of people thinking we aren't as rich and successful and talented and deserving and sophisticated as others.

Every one of these sins grows from the same deadly taproot: pride. Simply put, pride is that ugly part of your heart that causes you to be more concerned about yourself and your own reputation than you are about Christ and his.

Grace Uproots Pride

Perhaps the most sobering summary of pride is found in Proverbs 26:12—"Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him" (Prov. 26:12). Why is there little hope for him? Because pride puts a person beyond the perceived need for instruction. The proud heart is impervious to rebuke and insensitive to conviction. That's why he's more hopeless than the fool.

So how do we uproot pride from our hearts? How do we overcome its insidious influence? There are many answers, but none more helpful than the principle we find in 1 Corinthians 4:7. Paul asks the arrogant Corinthians, "For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?"

It is difficult for the person who understands the sovereignty of God's grace to be prideful, unless of course he takes credit for understanding it. Pride is taking credit for what God has done. To know that all we have is a gift, that all we experience and enjoy is an expression of God's goodness and not ours, to know that everything in our possession—especially our salvation—comes from the hand of God is to take the first step in defeating and dethroning pride from our hearts.

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