

"And Jesus called them to him and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. But it shall not be so among you. But whoever would be great among you must be your servant, and whoever would be first among you must be slave of all."

Mark 10:42-44

Introduction

Pride has been called the root cause of all other sin because in order to disobey God on any issue, we first must subvert Him in our minds and position ourselves in authority or wisdom over Him. This is pride. Pride is assumed to be the reason Satan went from a beautiful angel of light to the darkest demon of all. He wanted to overthrow God and rule on his own, which is exactly our motivation each time we sin. We may not consider our little bits of pride as dangerous bedfellows with evil rebellion, but that is what they are.

Consider what the book of Proverbs teaches us about pride.

"Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord; assuredly, he will not be unpunished." (16:5) "When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom." (11:12) "A man's pride will bring him low, but a humble spirit will obtain honor." (29:23)

Proverbs also teaches us the opposite of pride in these verses - humility. But humility can be hard for us to grasp. In fact, some have called it the "shy virtue" because anytime we get close to it, humility seems to run away from us.

For instance, when we sacrifice for others, when we listen without pushing our own agenda, or when we give preference to someone else, we can become prideful of our humble actions. Or worse, someone could ask us, "How do you remain so humble?" at which point humility will skirt away, and we will be filled with feelings of superiority over those who aren't able to accomplish what we have.

This week, we will look at humility, how it can develop in us without pride slipping in, and what might be at stake in our relationships with other believers if we skip over this critical virtue.

Group Video Discussion

Watch Video 2 Putting others before ourselves

Four traits that indicate we aren't valuing others more than ourselves:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Your notes:

Which of the four traits do you personally struggle with the most in your interactions with other believers?

Personal Daily Devotions

Day 8

Away with selfish ambition

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit...

Philippians 2:3

Selfish ambition: our internal drive to work for our own benefit ahead of the benefit of others.

Vain conceit: literally, “glory emptiness.” That void we feel when we don’t get the credit we deserve, aren’t valued, or aren’t praised.

James reminds us (3:16) when we operate out of selfish ambition, we will find disorder and every evil practice. Why? Because if our own benefit is the goal, we will use others, discard others, or step on others if it aids our mission to benefit ourselves.

Even if we treat others nicely, it might be because we believe that’s the best way to attain our own benefit. But as soon as we believe it would benefit us more to ignore another believer we don’t like or don’t agree with, or be condescending to someone in the family of faith, we will turn on a dime and speak badly of them, undermine them, or disregard them. Our true ambition will be revealed for what it is — self-serving instead of serving others.

Vain conceit or being emptied of glory can be related. If we don’t feel praised or valued, we run around begging for validation and will be crushed by any amount of criticism. Even if we find enough pats on the back, that will only suffice until the next time we need applause. We may even slander fellow believers who we feel should have praised us, or are getting praise instead of us. We might lash out in anger or collapse in despair when emptied of glory, and neither benefits others. Both are self-serving.

How then can we be filled? Only through hearing Christ’s applause can we be replenished. When we know we always have His praise, we will feel valued regardless of criticism. Then, with our own needs already met through Him, our ambition can be selfless.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

In what ways have you sought your own benefit ahead of the benefit of others in the Body of Christ?

In the Body of Christ, have you ever felt you were not valued by others? Explain.

What would change in your relationships with other believers if you didn't look to them to fill your emptiness and instead only thought of how you could benefit them?

Day 9

Consider others better than yourself

*...but in humility consider others better than yourselves.
Each of you should look not only to your own interests,
but also to the interests of others.
Philippians 2:3-4*

No one has ever done this to the extent Jesus did. *“He, being in very nature God, emptied Himself of that status and became a servant.”* (Philippians 2:6-7) Even though He had unquestionable rights to all dignity, praise, and honor, He let go of those and made Himself *“with no form or majesty that we should look at Him, and no beauty that we should desire Him. He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; and as one from whom men hide their faces, He was despised and we esteemed Him not.”* (Isaiah 53:2-3)

Even though He literally was (and is!) God and is therefore higher and worthier than anyone, He made Himself lower and less than everyone.

We seem to do the opposite. Even though we are not God, we view ourselves as better than others - at least some others. We look down on Christians who we consider less holy than ourselves. We feel superior to those who don't sacrifice as much as we do for the church. We dismiss those who complain about issues we believe to be trivial. We feel our gifts are more valuable than other people's gifts. We elevate ourselves above others. We give ourselves more status in our own minds than we give others in the church.

Following Jesus means we cannot do this. We cannot look down on anyone for anything if we follow the God who lowered Himself beneath everyone. We must lower ourselves below everyone as well. *“In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus.”* Philippians 2:5.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Whom do you naturally look up to in the Body of Christ? Whom do you naturally look down on?

Do you treat these two groups differently? If so, how?

What would happen in our church relationships if we treated everyone the way we treat the people we admire most?

How does Christ's emptying of His status, honor, and dignity inspire you to lower yourself? What "lowering" action can you do today in your relationships with other believers?

Day 10

Swallow your pride

For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?

1 Corinthians 4:7

All that we have has been given to us. Sure, we made decisions to work long hours and sacrifice much, so in a sense, we have “earned” some of what we have. But consider if we were born in a different time or place. What if, instead of being born where we were, we were born in 1000 B.C. on a small hill in Siberia? Could we have accomplished anything remotely similar to what we have achieved in our actual time and place? Of course not. Would we have had the same resources? Could our particular gifts have been developed in the same way?

Who decided for us to be where we are, when we are, and with the experiences we have had? Who decided the family and upbringing we were given? What about the opportunities we were given along the way? Was it us? Did we determine that path? No. It was given to us. We may want to argue, “No! Even if I had been born in a different time and place, I would have been able to climb to the top of *that* pile and would have achieved more than anyone else around me.” Maybe so. But how did we end up with that kind of attitude? Where did we get the desire to climb to the top of the pile? Who gave us our brains and made them work in the particular ways they do?

Everything we have has been given to us. How then can we look down on others in the community of faith for having “less” than us? Less money, less success, less beauty, less interpersonal skills, less difficulty in life, less ability, less talent, less _____ .

Our attitude should not be haughty superiority to anyone else when we have been given all we have. Our attitude should only be humble gratefulness for what God has done in our lives.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

When you see someone with “less” than you in the Body of Christ, do you react with feelings of superiority or with feelings of humility, recognizing that without God’s unmerited gifts, you would be in the exact same place?

What gift has God given you that you tend to take credit for? Appearance? Work ethic? Intelligence? Wealth? Education? Nation of birth?

What could be different about your life if you had been given a different work ethic, level of intelligence, educational opportunities, or nationality?

Day 11

Gain understanding

My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.

James 1:19

We find it so easy to listen to, and try to understand, a new romantic interest or perhaps our boss. But it's often really hard to listen to others who have upset us or hold a different perspective - even those alongside us in the Body of Christ.

When there is friction with another person, we often, without even checking, assume we know the motives behind their actions and believe them to be laughable or even malicious. We don't seek understanding. We don't try to listen. We assume we have the answers and have no need to look for facts.

"They didn't invite me on purpose." "He thinks my email was stupid." "She doesn't value my opinion so I won't share it." "How could anyone do what they did and think it was a good idea?" "He doesn't want to help me."

We can often internally speak these things to ourselves (and maybe externally to others) without first making the effort to listen and understand. "Is there a reason I wasn't invited?" "What did you think of my email?" "Do you want to know my opinion?" "Is it ok if I ask for your help?"

We might not ask these questions because we think other believers will lie to us if we do. We think they might try to make us feel better without admitting their true motive. But that's another assumption. Once again, we aren't listening. We aren't seeking to understand because we believe we already know.

Jesus sought to listen to us so deeply that He became human in part to sympathize with our weaknesses (Hebrews 4:15). If we follow the One who was willing to subject Himself to our temptations and weaknesses in order to understand us, may we at least be willing to listen to those who hurt us or disagree with us, so we will know what's really true and not just what we assume to be true.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

How do you listen and respond to the person you respect and/or love the most when you disagree or when that person has upset you? How would your relationships with other Christians change if you treated all of them in this way?

How do you listen and respond to someone you don't respect? What if Jesus had responded to you the way you respond to that person?

How does reflecting on Jesus' patience and willingness to sacrifice in order to understand you, motivate you to listen to and understand others more?

Day 12

Share others' joys and sorrows

Rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep.
Romans 12:15

Mi casa es su casa. My house is your house. We love hearing those words because it means we get to share whatever belongs to the people who own the house. But what if the house is full of sorrows and burdens? We may want to say, "Thanks, but I don't want anything in your house!"

Jesus had a different mindset. He bore our suffering and even our sin (Isaiah 53) when no one else would or could. He comes to our house of sorrows and gives us His house of joy. He weeps with us and carries our burdens on a daily basis because He freely chooses to connect with sinful people.

If Christ is within us, we will desire what He desires in growing measure. We will pick up the burdened Christians around us and carry their sorrows with them. We won't avoid the person in the Body of Christ who always complains. We won't dodge the person who has needs. We won't hurry the conversation past the part where fellow believers tell us of their troubles. We will enter into and connect with their complaints, needs, and troubles.

But there is another message in these verses - perhaps even more convicting. We are to rejoice with those who rejoice. The success of others should bring us joy. When others get the relationship, the job, the promotion, the recognition, the praise, the house, or the cure, we should celebrate with them. If their house is filled with joy, our casa will be as well.

If we feel threatened, empty, or wonder "Why not me?" when others celebrate, we are not rejoicing with those who rejoice, regardless of how we act toward them. May we be so bound to others that their emotions are our emotions as well.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

When you know a fellow believer with some kind of burden, do you tend to run toward that person or away from that person? Or something in between?

Do you tend first to calculate how much energy and effort it will take to help someone in the community of faith and then decide whether or not to help based on that calculation?

How does reflecting on Jesus carrying your burdens help motivate you to carry the burdens of others?

When others rejoice, do you tend to rejoice as well or do you feel something else? Threatened? Jealous? Empty? Sorrowful?

Day 13

Give preference to one another

*Be devoted to one another in brotherly love;
give preference to one another in honor.*

Romans 12:10

“I’d rather other Christians receive their preference than for me to receive my preference. I would be happier if the rest of those in the Body of Christ got their way than if I got mine.”

How do those sentences feel? How does giving up your preferences make you feel? How does it feel to let go of getting your own way so others can get their way?

Not so good? Let’s admit it. We want our way, and we want our preferences. And if we could have them NOW, that would be even better. Me first. Then, after me, if there is something left over, maybe you can have it. Unless, of course, if I think of something else I want.

But in Christ, things are to be different. In Christ, we follow Someone who gave up all of His perks and preferences so we could have perks and preference from God. Since we have our need for preferential treatment completely met by Christ giving us His status before God, we can freely give preference to others. We know that even if we don’t get our way in the immediate circumstance, the final outcome will always be the most favorable one for all of us because of our high status in God’s eyes.

Giving up our desires and preferences ultimately doesn’t cost us anything in the end because being a part of God’s family means all things will ultimately work for our favor. And theirs.

There’s no sense holding a grudge or hanging onto bitterness when others get their way and we don’t. There’s no reason to be angry or feel like we are somehow missing out. In Christ, we know whatever happens will all work out for our best.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Is it relatively easy or more difficult for you to give up your preferences to other Christians?

When it's difficult, why do you think it's so difficult? What do you feel is at stake for you to lose?

What can sometimes prevent you from believing that God is always working toward what is best for you?

Day 14

Self-sacrificing actions

*Greater love has no one than this,
that one lay down his life for his friends.*

John 15:13

For many of us, it may be relatively easy to say we would die for someone else because we are so far removed from any situation that may require that type of action. We will probably never need to take a bullet for someone. We will probably never be on the deck of the Titanic and be asked to give our seat on the lifeboat to someone else. These situations are so hypothetical we may not be able to emotionally grasp what we would do if we were actually given the opportunity to die so someone else could live.

Isn't it bizarre that we'd like to think we are the type of people who would give up our seat on the lifeboat to save a complete stranger, and yet we complain when we are asked to volunteer at church?

Isn't it odd that we'd like to think if someone came into our church and started shooting, we'd be the self-sacrificing hero saving the lives of our fellow believers, but we are only willing to sacrifice for other believers on a day-to-day basis if it's convenient and it doesn't cost us too much time or money?

We may be willing to give up our lives for others, but we seem hesitant to live for them.

Jesus did both. He healed others, fed others, wept with others, walked with others, washed others, took time for others, and died for others. Simply by leaving heaven, He gave up comfort and status to come to earth where He had neither. And He did that for us.

If we'd like to think we'd die for the Christians around us, we need to be willing to live for them. To serve them. This is part of what it means to lay down our lives for them. We give up our convenience for them. We give up our status for them. We give up our security for them. We give up our time for them.

Your Personal Reflection and Application

Have you ever thought you'd be willing to die for someone? If so, have you ever groaned about giving up something less valuable than your life for other Christians? Like your time, attention, or money?

How would your relationships with other believers change if you approached them thinking, "What can I give up for them today?"

What is more inspiring to you, that Jesus gave up His life or that He gave up His comfort and status for you? Which motivates you to live for others more?