

West Side Fellowship

The Fruit of Pride

For by the grace given me I say to everyone of you: Do not think of yourselves more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgement, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.

Romans 12v3

Last week we started to look at the issue of pride and it's a subject we shall return to this week because pride in it's various forms is a spiritual cancer that eats us away from the inside. The problem with pride is that just like cancer, it can go undetected for years only revealing itself through symptoms that can easily be missed or confused with other things, for what we often don't understand about pride is that it is the breeding ground for sin, the place where other sin puts it's roots.

If we think back to the beginnings of sin and Satans fall, it's root was in pride and conceit. Pride is a boasting in what we have achieved, conceit, it's deadly brother, is pride in what we think we have achieved. I can have pride in coming first in a race, conceit is when I have pride in being victorious before the race has even been run. It is the sin we see in Satan as we read *Isaiah 14v12-15* as we see how Satans position in the heavens (*Ezekiel 28v14*) went to his head and suddenly he went from being a servant of God Almighty to seeing himself as equal. This blameless being (*Ezekiel 28v15*), the pinnacle of spiritual beauty (*Ezekiel 28v13*), fell because he thought he was more than he was. He lost his servant heart and served himself instead and as soon as he started to serve himself he proclaimed himself lord in his life, removing God Almighty from His deserved position (*Isaiah 14v14*).

Pride is a battle, a spiritual sickness that we all fight against. It is something that controls the sinful nature, for that sinful nature comes from the father of sinners, Satan himself. It is the exact opposite to the godly servant heart we see in Christ (*Philippians 2v6-8*). Let us remember that in our sinful nature we are descended from Satan and pride is the core of that fallen nature. The fruit of the sinful nature that we see growing in our lives come from our pride and conceit, that demands that our fleshly desires are met at any cost (*Galatians 5v19-21*), they are in constant rebellion to the will of God. Likewise the fruit of the Spirit, the godly life that the Father desires in us comes out of a humbled heart that has been willing to set aside it's pride by crucifying the sinful nature (*Galatians 5v22-24*).

If we look at all the great men of God in scripture, they all had a common trait, humility, the exact opposite of pride and conceit. Moses was described as the most humble man that had ever lived (*Numbers 12v3*), as we look at other great men, Abraham, David, Solomon. All these men on their good days humbled themselves before God. Only as their pride rose up and they lost their servant hearts do we see them falling into sin. Thankfully most of the time they became aware of their sin and that led to repentance, a true repentance that led to a change of heart, a humbling. So often when we think of repentance, it's treated as a way of saying "sorry" for the bad we have done. The

sin we have done is from a heart attitude. Without the change of heart towards God the same sin will return as we read in *Luke 11v23-26*. For if the heart direction does not change, we may throw things out of our life, but without the heart change they will just be replaced by something else. Our hearts cannot be empty, they are either set on ourselves or on the Lord; if we will not turn to the Lord in humble service then the enemy will return and bring friends for he knows he has found a heart that's in line with his. It is why whenever we read about repentance in scripture it is always associated with an action that follows. The action in itself is not as important as the heart attitude behind it, for the action should come out of a heart of humility before God, the action is the overflow of the heart, the fruit of being led by the Spirit.

One area we need to be very careful of when it comes to pride is ministry, it is very easy to think of ourselves as having "made it", of being above others. It is why Paul warns Timothy when looking for elders by saying:

He must not be a recent convert, or he may become conceited and fall under the same judgement as the devil.

1 Timothy 3v6

What Paul is warning about here is that if the humbled servant heart attitude has not taken over from the crucified flesh, then lifting the person up to a position of authority will bring about exactly the same downfall as happened in Satan's life. We see this in the lives of those who "want to be" in the church, those who want position, authority, control. This is not from the godly nature but the sinful, prideful nature and the danger when promoted in pride is that the spiritual cancer grows into a full blown case of conceit leading to a total hardening of the heart towards God even while supposedly going about His works. It is why some of the most overlooked verses in the epistles contain some of the most important statements.

"Paul, a servant of Christ Jesus, called to be..."

Romans 1v1

Paul, the man who went from a heart of pride and conceit to a servant heart, is a true picture of repentance. The acknowledgement of the servant heart that is called to be, according to the Lord's timing is found in the introductions of just about every letter in the New Testament. The constant acknowledgement that they are in their roles by the grace of God and the calling that the Lord has placed on their lives in response to their humility before him. The higher the position we are called to, in the eyes of men, the more we need to watch our pride, for don't forget Satan was in the highest place when his pride destroyed him. Let us not think we are any less susceptible to pride striking at any time. It is a warning to us all, but especially those in ministry.

At the same time it is a warning to those who are trying to get themselves into a position in the church. Stop pushing and allow the Lord to be the one who lifts you up. Concentrate on the daily obedience that comes from humbly listening to the Lord, for you will only be ready for promotion when your heart has truly been humbled, not when in your pride you assume it has been humbled. For the humility that God is looking for is not a humility towards man but a humility towards him. We can easily use our humility towards men as a way of manipulating them, for our fleshly humility can manipulate their pride. When it comes to true Christlike humility, what men think is irrelevant, it is what the Father thinks that matters, for He will not be deceived by our false humility and flattery for He sees the truth of the heart.

*The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: ...
Galatians 5v19*

Although the outcome of the sinful nature may be easily seen, the blindness that comes upon us through sin easily deceives us from the root cause of these sins, pride! It means that we often try to treat the illness by treating the symptoms rather than going to the heart of the matter, for changing the heart will lead to a change of the overflow of that heart (Luke 6v43-45). As an example of this today we will look at forgiveness and how it is hampered by pride, not only the asking for forgiveness, but the receiving as well. For with pride we lift ourselves up above others, we see ourselves as being better and worth more.

I experienced a simple example of this in my own life when the insurance was being sorted out for my motorbike crash. Because the accident was not my fault I was entitled to compensation for the damages caused and I had received a lot of damage during the accident. I didn't realise that there are standard calculations for how much compensation is received for different injuries. Somehow it's all been costed out so that if you lose a finger it has a value, lose a hand it has a greater value. However when I was told the compensation value of my injuries, especially to my arm I was upset, for I placed a higher value on my arm than the courts did. I felt I deserved more because it was "my arm" and so greater recompense should be made towards me. Why, because of pride, it was me that had been hurt and my injuries took priority over anyone else's. In my pride I saw my arm as being of superior value to other peoples arms and therefore I deserved better compensation. Needless to say the judge did not view me as superior in any way and he saw no reason why an exception should be made for me because of who I thought I was or the perspective I had of the offence towards me.

We tend to do the same when it comes to forgiveness, we see ourselves as being superior and therefore more deserving than others, the root being pride at work. It is an area where we desperately need to fix our eyes and thoughts on Jesus as the example of putting the flesh and it's pride to death.

Let us think for a moment about injustice, for in our pride it is always us that has suffered injustice. Yet when we look at Jesus, we see the Son of God, the sinless one. Think about that for a moment, the sinless one! Anyone who was offended by anything Jesus said or did was offended because of their rebellion against God, Jesus himself never sinned. He didn't break any laws, he hadn't stolen or deceived. He was the most innocent of the innocent, he had not committed any offence so had no penalty or punishment due him. So if anyone had any claim to self righteousness it was Jesus alone; for the rest of us, let us deal with our self righteous pride by considering the following:

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.
Romans 3v23*

Sadly in our pride, we measure ourselves against other men and women. Somehow we see ourselves as falling short of the glory of God yet being superior to other sinners around us, not realising that the same core sickness, pride, infects us just as much as it infects them, and our very attitude displays it.

As we think of the righteousness of Christ, his total innocence, we see that it did not go to his head and that he remained humbled and obedient before the Father even when that obedience led to death on the cross (*Philippians 2v8*). It is an aspect of the cross that we can easily overlook, but

Jesus, the perfect sinless Lamb of God suffered the worst atrocities and punishments that man could think of and yet did not become bitter or angry towards those who inflicted these totally unfair and undeserved punishments upon him. Even more, he was so humbled before God that instead of wishing hellfire and damnation upon the inflictors of his agony he did exactly the opposite with the immortal words from the cross:

Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing.

Luke 23v34

Here the totally innocent Jesus asks the Father to forgive the inflictors of his pain and suffering while they are still carrying out the offence. He doesn't allow self righteousness, self pity, or self justification to start to breed in pride, rather in humility he kills any pride dead before it can start to take root, that is godly humility in action.

This attitude is not something that is reserved for Jesus, rather it is to be expected of all followers of Christ (*Philippians 2v5*). It is the attitude we see Stephen displaying as he was stoned to death having committed no crime (*Acts 7v60*); it is the true attitude of picking up the cross daily and following after Jesus (*Luke 9v23-25*). So often, even when we say we have forgiven, the remnants of anger and bitterness remain, that self righteousness that comes from having been wronged. Sadly as we dwell on these things and allow them to deepen their roots we miss the fact that what is really happening is that pride and conceit is spiritually killing us, without realising it, we have become deceived by our pride hardened hearts.

True forgiveness can only be asked for and received from a humbled heart, the heart with pride will always struggle in this area, for pride is the breeding ground for anger and bitterness. It is not about what others are doing, waiting for them to act first. It is about where our heart is before the Lord and we need to realise that if there is pride, Satan will attack us over and over by working on our pride, the sense of injustice towards us that in turn feeds bitterness and anger. Satan as the great deceiver, and our flesh that follows after him, will always give us an excuse, a reason, a justification for our anger and bitterness, be it towards an individual, a church, an organisation, company or government. We will even use scripture to justify ourselves, yet whenever we try to justify ourselves, all we are doing is allowing our pride to rise up in rebellion against the ways of God. For we, just like them, have all fallen short of the glory of God and rebelled in our pride in our own way.

"If any one of you is without sin, let him be the first to throw a stone at her".

John 8v7

Turning from pride is not easy, the hardest part is even recognising the issue exists, but even when we see the truth how do we combat it. The answer is simple, by seeking the Lord and walking in obedience on a daily, hourly, minute by minute basis. Training our heart to submit its ways before Him who humbled himself for us.