

# Word Study PRIDE

(Ian S Davidson, Motherwell)

Pride is frequently condemned in the Scriptures. For example, we read: **"The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor: let them be taken in the devices they have imagined."** (Psalm 10:2); **"Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, and respects not the proud, nor such as turn aside to lies."** (Psalm 40:4); **"When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the lowly is wisdom."** (Proverbs 11:2); **"Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."** (Proverbs 16:18); **"A high look, and a proud heart, and the ploughing of the wicked, is sin."** (Proverbs 21:4); **"He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife: but he who puts his trust in the Lord shall be made fat."** (Proverbs 28:25); **"God resists the proud, but gives grace unto the humble."** (James 4:6b; 1 Peter 5:5b); **"For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world."** (I John 2:16); etc.

## HAUGHTINESS CONDEMNED

In the Bible, those guilty of pride include: Pharaoh, Naaman, Uzziah, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar and Belshazzar. The Moabites, the Assyrians, the Philistines, the Israelites, and many others, are condemned for their haughty and proud spirit. The Hebrew word for 'pride' is *ga'on* and the Greek word is *huperephania*. The Greek adjective is *huperephanos*. This Greek word is derived from *huper*, 'above' and *phainesthai*, 'to show oneself'. It speaks of the man who looks down on everyone else in an arrogant and self-conceited manner. We have all met such people. They are everywhere. They despise not only their fellow men, but also God Himself. Where does this pride come from? As one writer says: "It can come from pride in birth, from pride in wealth, from pride in knowledge, from aristocratic pride, from intellectual pride, from spiritual pride." Truly, pride is of the spirit of the age; humility is of the Spirit of Christ. I, for example, have met quite a number of wealthy people through my banking career. Some of the wealthiest people were some of the nicest people I ever encountered. However, there were others who gave me a very difficult time. They had to be heard or seen on demand. Nothing was more important than their 'request'. After all, the world revolved around them and, without them, the world would be a far poorer place. They never liked to hear 'no' for an answer and would be the first to complain to Head Office if they did not get what they wanted. They treated everyone with disdain and, dare I say, the wives were sometimes worse than the husbands. I believe that God sometimes gives riches to people as a test. Tragically, many fail it. Being rich, in itself, is not a sin, but being haughtily proud in wealth is.

## THE CORRUPTING EFFECT OF PRIDE

Pride always leads to arrogance and boasting. Paul, in his epistle to the saints at Rome, speaks of the corruption of the Gentiles. That corruption resulted, amongst other things, in their being proud and boastful (1:30). An ancient writer commented: "It is inevitable that those who have great possessions should become

inflated with pride; then that being inflated with pride they should become boastful; then that being boastful they should become arrogant, and think that there is no one like themselves." Aristotle once wrote: "The characters which accompany wealth are plain for all to see. The wealthy are insolent and arrogant, being mentally affected by the acquisition of wealth, for they seem to think that they possess all good things; for wealth is a kind of standard of value of everything else, so that everything seems purchasable by it." In the light of these comments, I like the words of Moses E.Lard: "The truly noble are never proud."

There is an important verse to be highlighted here. It is found in I Timothy 3: 6, "Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil." Paul, of course, is dealing with the qualifications of elders. To paraphrase his words: "You do not put a novice in the office because through pride he could fall into the very same condemnation that the devil fell into." Pride resulted in Satan's downfall. Albert Barnes has written: "It is here intimated that the cause of the apostasy of Satan was pride – a cause which is likely to have been the true one as any other. Who can tell but it may have been produced by some new honour which was conferred on him in heaven, and that his virtue was not found sufficient for the untried circumstances in which he was placed?" No wonder C.S. Lewis has described pride as "The Great Sin" in his book *Mere Christianity*. He writes: "The Christians are right: it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together: you may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or unchaste people. But pride always means enmity – it *is* enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God". D.H.Tongue has pointed out: "The gospel message of righteousness through Christ sounds the death-knell of self righteousness in religion; that is why it was a stumbling block to the proud Jews. (Romans 9:30 – 10:4). The NT emphasis made a deep impact on early and mediaeval ethics. Augustine, Aquinas and Dante all characterised pride as the ultimate sin, while Milton and Goethe dramatised it."

## HUMILITY EXALTS

Satan and Jesus stand in complete contrast. Satan spells pride; Jesus spells humility. Paul wrote: **"...and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled Himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross."** (Philippians 2:8). Jesus said: **"For whosoever exalts himself shall be abased; and he who humbles himself shall be exalted."** (Luke 14:11; 18:14) What does Paul go on to say in the ninth verse of Philippians chapter 2? **"Wherefore God also has highly exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above every name."** For Jesus, the way to glory was through the cross. What humility!

A final thought. "Ancient Greek teaching was at variance with Judaism in regarding pride as a virtue and humility as despicable." (D. Tongue) Jesus changed a lot of things when He came into the world and one of the things He changed was the view of the word "humble". To the Greeks, it was the equivalent of servile, low, cringing. But Jesus accorded it supreme excellence. He said during His ministry: **"Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and you shall find rest unto your souls."** (Matthew 11: 29). Truly, pride, arrogance and boasting are of Satan and not of God. Pride is a vice; humility is a virtue. Thank you Jesus for showing us clearly which is which.