

The Awful Sin of Pride



David Wilkerson February 8, 1988

Pride is at the very top of the list of things God hates. "These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: a proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, an heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren" (Proverbs 6:16-19).

The Bible says further, "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" (1 John 2:16). Most Christians admit they battle against the lusts of the flesh and the eyes. They know what lust is, they hate it and flee from it by the power of the Spirit. Christians also recognize pride in others because they may appear to be stuck up, self-centered, ambitious and high-minded.

But few Christians would consider themselves proud. Most Christians will admit they have not arrived, that they are not as Christlike as they want to be and that there are areas in their lives that need improvement. But few Christians recognize pride in themselves. Do you recognize it in yourself? Many Christians would admit, "Well, I may be self-assured — even confident. At the worst I may see myself as more talented or intelligent than others. But I'm not proud! I give God all the credit for what I've accomplished and for who I am. It's all in His strength. Proud? I don't think I can honestly admit to that. After all, I walk in holiness and I open my heart to be searched by His Word. Surely He would have shown it to me."

Recently the Holy Spirit spoke to my heart about this hateful sin. I said, "Lord, You mean You want me to preach a message about pride at Time Square Church, don't You? There must be pride in the congregation." The Spirit's answer stunned me. "No, David, I want to speak to you about pride, about the subtle kinds of pride that you yourself are guilty of. First you must see it in your own heart; then you may preach it to others." Like most other Christians, I thought I was at least trying to be humble. We take care not to boast like Pharisees about being better than all the rest. But deep within our hearts we think, "I'm not arrogant, boastful or overly ambitious. So how could I be proud?"

The Word has been dealing with me, exposing forms of pride I did not know were so deeply imbedded in me — and a pride that is the worst kind of all. When the Spirit said, "Pride in you, David," I replied, "But Lord, I'm not trying to be somebody great! You know that. I'm not a braggart or a boaster. I am honestly trying to decrease so Christ can increase. If there is pride in me, I can't even see it. Please show it to me. Expose it to me!" And He showed me! As I look back I tremble at how many times I committed this hateful sin. I am guilty of it.

What Is Pride?

God sees pride in an entirely different way than we do. He showed me that I had too narrow a definition of pride. Yes, there is a wicked, boastful, arrogant pride, and it can be seen all about us in these days. But there is also a pride that is spiritual in nature. It is committed by those who have walked closely with God and it can be seen in the holiest among us. The more spiritual you are, the more revelation you have had, the closer to Him that you have been, the more hideous this sin is when it is committed. It is not a way of life, although it could become so. It is a sin that is often committed even on our knees, while seeking God.

To understand this message, I want to give you new definitions of pride and humility. Pride is independence — humility is dependence. Pride is an unwillingness to wait for God to act in His own time and in His own way. Pride rushes in to take matters into its own hands. One of the greatest temptations true Christians face is getting ahead of God. It is acting without a clear mandate from God. It is taking things into our own hands when it appears that God is not working fast enough. It is impatience.

Saul Couldn't Wait for God's Time

Saul committed this terrible sin at Gilgal, as recounted in 1 Samuel 10. When Samuel anointed Saul as king, "Samuel communed with Saul upon the top of the house" (1 Samuel 9:25). This rooftop discussion centered on the great war that was coming with the Philistines. Samuel was preparing Saul, letting him know that he was divinely called to break this bondage. When the time was ripe, when the Philistines and Israel approached the brink of war, Samuel commanded Saul not to act, not to go to war, until all the people met at Gilgal to seek the Lord for specific directions. "And thou shalt go down before me to Gilgal.... Seven days shalt thou tarry, till I come to thee, and show thee what thou shalt do" (1 Samuel 10:8). This was to be all God's doing. He alone wants to be in total control.

Samuel represented God's voice. Not a word of his "fell to the ground!" God, through Samuel, would supernaturally, sovereignly give them direction. "I will show thee what thou must do." God would make all the plans — He would show them how to wage war. Saul was directed to do nothing more than to go to the altar at Gilgal and wait for the word to come. But war started when Jonathan smote a garrison at Geba. "And Jonathan smote the garrison of the Philistines that was in Geba, and the Philistines heard of it. And Saul blew the trumpet throughout all the land, saying, Let the Hebrews hear. And all Israel heard say that Saul had smitten a garrison of the Philistines, and that Israel also was had in abomination with the Philistines. And the people were called together after Saul to Gilgal" (1 Samuel 13:3-4).

Saul waited impatiently. "And the people were called together after Saul at Gilgal...." Israel was in panic as a great Philistine army approached with thousands of charots, 6,000 horsemen and an army that appeared to them as numerous as the sand on the seashore. Saul's army was deserting on all sides and it had been at best a motley bunch with not a single sword among them. All they had were sickles, axes and farm tools. This is the very war crisis that Samuel had discussed with Saul months before on the rooftop. This was meant to be a time of gathering at Gilgal to wait on God for His clear word of direction. But Saul gave God a deadline. If the word did not come by a certain hour, Saul determined to do whatever he had to do to save the situation. "And he tarried seven days, according to the set time that Samuel had appointed: but Samuel came not to Gilgal; and the people were scattered from him. And Saul said, Bring hither a burnt offering to me, and peace offerings. And he offered the burnt offering" (1 Samuel 13:8-9).

This was not just to be a matter of waiting, but of waiting until — until the word came, until direction from heaven was given. "Wait...till I come to thee, and show thee...." Why was Samuel just a few hours late? Because Saul was being tested to see if he believed that God could be trusted, to see if Saul would trust and obey even if things were not right on schedule. Samuel delayed because God spoke to him clearly and told him to delay. God wanted Saul to be a testimony of humble dependence on God in all things, especially in a dark crisis.

But Saul failed the test. He looked at conditions and all appeared hopeless. An impatient spirit overwhelmed him. Logic told him that it was getting too late, that something just had to be done. I can just hear him, "I can't take this indecision any longer. God sent me to do His work and I'm willing to die for His cause. But here I sit doing nothing. There's no guidance, no word from God. I've got to make something happen or it will be all over. If we keep doing nothing, we'll be completely out of control." This is unmitigated pride — the need to be in control of the situation. Saul really believed things were spinning out of control.

This is where I have so often failed. I have hated not being in control of situations. Not that I want to be the boss or to lord it over others. It's just that I don't like the sense of helplessness and dependency. Living in New York, this is the first time I have had to live in a high rise apartment at the mercy of the landlord, the superintendent, the union, the elevators, and the broken heaters. When things don't work, I have to wait and wait and wait. I tell my wife, "I've had enough of this. We're going to buy our own place so that we can be in control. This is ridiculous!" I want to be in control.

In regards to Time Square Church, I sometimes feel as Saul did with impossibilities looming on all sides. We seem

so helpless and the enemy seems so big and powerful. I get overly anxious about being in control. I don't like having to rent and be at the mercy of changeable landlords. God has promised us a permanent place. But I want it now! I'm impatient! There's so much to be done and so little time. I think to myself, "How long, Lord? I don't like to be out of control. We need some action!"

But God says, "Do you trust Me? Wait! Having done all you can, just stand still and see the salvation of the Lord!" The hardest part of faith is the last half hour, just before the answer is about to come forth, just before God is about to work a miracle. That's when we wilt, we faint, we try to make something happen. That is sinful pride. "And it came to pass, that as soon as he had made an end of offering the burnt offering, behold, Samuel came; and Saul went out to meet him, that he might salute him" (1 Samuel 13:10). As soon as he took matters into his own hands, Samuel arrived. Divine direction was right at the door, just minutes away! But Saul couldn't wait!

Implications of Not Waiting for God to Work

We charge God with deception. By impatiently acting on his own, Saul was saying "God sent me out to do His work, but left me to figure out how to get it done. He told me to do this, but now He's making me sit and wait. If God won't answer, He can't judge me for what I have to do." Playing god is terrible pride. It is charging God with neglect. We are commanded, like Saul, to wait on the Lord, to stand still and see His salvation, to trust in Him at all times so He can direct our paths. But when the deadline we set has passed, and there is an anger against God and we can't wait, we run off and make things happen. We are saying by our actions, "God doesn't really care about me. God has let me down. Prayer and waiting doesn't work. Things just get worse. I can't just sit here being walked on." We really don't trust His Word.

Samuel's command was, "Go to Gilgal and wait...I will come, you will get directions," Before God, all Saul was responsible to do was to wait for the word! God wanted to hear Saul say, "God keeps His word; never once has a word from Samuel's lips fallen to the ground. God said wait for directions and I will wait. Let the whole army desert. Let every Israelite be a coward. Let every man be called a liar. If God has to, He will send me an army of angels. This isn't my war. I don't have the slightest idea of how to go after this great enemy. It's all in His hands. All I have been commanded to do is wait for the word."

But pride reasons, "God must not have meant it. Maybe I heard it wrong. The problem is in my seeing and hearing." Instead of standing on God's Word, we start figuring things out. In bed in the late hours we say, "Lord, here's how I see it can be done." It is wicked to do something very logical and reasonable when it is not God's clear word of direction. It may be the conclusion of wise men and logical minds, the only option open. But it is sin if it is not the word that comes from waiting only on God. We need to take the pressure off to perform, to do something. You don't have to do anything but stand on God's Word. If you want to prove anything to God, prove you will patiently wait for Him to act. Do you really believe God means what He says? It is dangerous to get ahead of God! It is independence.

"And Samuel said, What hast thou done? And Saul said, Because I saw that the people were scattered from me, and that thou camest not within the days appointed, and that the Philistines gathered themselves together at Michmash; therefore said I, The Philistines will come down now upon me to Gilgal, and I have not made supplication unto the Lord: I forced myself therefore, and offered a burnt offering. And Samuel said to Saul, Thou hast done foolishly: thou hast not kept the commandment of the Lord thy God, which he commanded thee: for now would the Lord have established thy kingdom upon Israel forever. But now thy kingdom shall not continue: the Lord hath sought him a man after his own heart, and the Lord hath commanded him to be captain over his people, because thou hast not kept that which the Lord commanded thee" (1 Samuel 13:11-14).

Saul waited seven days — but that wait was unholy. He was impatient, angry, fearful and pouting. We must wait with faith, believing that God cares for us and loves us, that He will be there on His time. This matter of waiting is so important that I must show you some Scriptures to prove it.

"And it shall be said in that day, Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us; this is the Lord; we have waited for him, we will be glad and rejoice in his Salvation..." (Isaiah 25:9).

"For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O God, beside thee, what he hath prepared for him that waiteth for him" (Isaiah 64:4).

Compare the impatient pride of Saul to David's waiting on God for direction. How beautiful! And how clear! "And the Philistines came up yet again, and spread themselves in the valley of Rephaim. And when David enquired of the Lord, he said, Thou shalt not go up; but fetch a compass behind them, and come upon them over against the mulberry trees. And let it be, when thou hearest the sound of [marching] in the tops of the mulberry trees, that then thou shalt bestir thyself: for then shall the Lord go out before thee, to smite the host of the Philistines. And David did so, as the Lord had commanded him; and smote the Philistines from Geba until thou come to Gazer" (2 Samuel 5:22-25). The enemy was spread out before him, but David must have the word of God! Only then will he bestir himself.

Servanthood

Pride is repelled by the idea of servanthood. Today everybody wants to be everything but a servant. The big children's game in America is called "Masters of the Universe!" But that is also becoming the theology of many Christians. We quote this Scripture, "Thou art no more a servant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ" (Galatians 4:7). What Paul is really saying is that a son who has been tutored correctly knows that he is legally the king's son with all rights, but he so loves his father he chooses the role of a servant. Paul, in the same book, said he was "a servant of Jesus Christ" (Romans 1:1), James called himself "a servant of the Lord Jesus" (2 Peter 1:1). And Christ, the Lord, the very Son of God "made himself of no reputation, and took upon Him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men.... He humbled Himself and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (v.5). A servant has no will of his own; his master's word is his will.

The Cross represents the death of all my own plans, all my own ideas, my own desires, my own hopes and dreams. It is most of all the absolute death of my own will. This is true humility. Humility is associated only with the Cross. "He humbled Himself — to death at the cross" (Philippians 2:7-8). He had told His disciples, "My meat," My fulfillment in life, "is to do the will of Him who sent me..." (John 4:34). He said "I can of mine own self do nothing: As I hear, I judge..." (John 5:30). In other words, I refuse to take matters into my own hands. I wait to hear every direction from my Father! He who is the Light, absolute intelligence, knowing all things, humbles Himself, makes Himself totally dependent upon the Father in all things. "I can't do it on My own," Jesus said.

John wrote, "As He is, so are we in this world" (1 John 4:17). There is not a true Christian but who can say, "I really want to do His perfect will." But here is where we miss it: we set our hearts on something that we want, something that looks good, that sounds logical, but is not God's will. We will fast and pray and intercede for it! Cry a river of tears! Claim it! Bind demons hindering possession of it! Quote Bible! Get others to agree with us! One of the biggest traps to Christians is a good idea which is not God's mind, a good strategy which is not His, a well-conceived plan that is not His. The question is — can your desire survive the Cross? Can you walk away from it and die to it? Can you honestly say, "Lord, maybe it's not the devil stopping me, but You! If it's not Your will it could destroy me. I give it up to the Cross! To death! Do it Your way, Lord."

It is when you go down into the grave of death to all self, all ambition, all self-will, that you hear His voice. Jesus said, "The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God... All that are in the graves shall hear His voice" (John 5:25,28). This is why thousands of Christians today are getting into trouble hearing still small voices. There is confusion, things are not coming out right, because there has been no dying to self-will. Yes, I believe God does speak to His children. You can hear His true, holy, unmistakable voice, but only after crucifixion of self-will and self-desire. Jesus heard clearly from the Father. So did Paul, Peter, John and Stephen; but only because they were dead to this world. They were consumed with doing His will only.

What Is Humility?

Humility is total dependency on God. It is trusting God to do the right thing at the right time in the right way. It is trusting Him to use you in the right way at the right time. Humility is patiently waiting on the Lord in a spirit of expectant faith. Pride has no patience. "Rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for him: fret not thyself because of him who prospereth in his way, because of the man who brings wicked devices to pass...fret not thyself in any wise to do evil" (Psalm 37:7,8). This tells us, "Don't get uptight by the apparent success of those who look like they are passing you up. They take shortcuts. They are blessed and prospered while here you sit, trusting God, praying." God says, "Just wait. They are on slippery ground. You won't be sorry if you do it My way. Patience is doing a work in you. You are becoming strong by waiting in faith. Let patience do its perfect work in you!"

The person with godly experience is not the busy-beaver Christian. Rather, it is the one patiently waiting on God in faith. He is gaining experience, as we are told in Romans 5:4. "Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy" (James 5:10,11). God equates "walking worthy before him" with joyful patience and long suffering. "That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing...strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness" (Colossians 1:10,11)

Jesus' Promise for the Last Days

Jesus has left us a glorious promise to see us through the dark days ahead! He said, "Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth" (Revelation 3:10). Jesus is saying, "You stayed true when tested by the world. You joyfully waited for Me to work things out. Now, while there is confusion all around, while the worldwide test is on, I will keep you from it. You've proven you will trust Me, come what may!"

The Lord is right now preparing a humble people who have proven God faithful. Not only do they say, "God has everything under control." They actually let Him have control of their lives. "He shall not be afraid of evil tidings: his heart is fixed, trusting in the Lord" (Psalm 112:7).

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