

PRIDE

(J. C. Philpot, excerpted from his "Reviews" 1853)

"I hate pride and arrogance." Proverbs 8:13

"The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished." Prov. 16:5

Of all sins **pride** seems most deeply imbedded in the very heart of man. Unbelief, sensuality, covetousness, rebellion, presumption, contempt of God's holy will and word, hatred and enmity against the saints of the Most High, deceit and falsehood, cruelty and wrath, violence and murder—these, and a forest of other sins have indeed struck deep roots into the black and noxious soil of our fallen nature; and, interlacing their lofty stems and gigantic arms, have wholly shut out the light of heaven from man's benighted soul. But these and their associate evils do not seem so thoroughly interwoven into the very constitution of the human heart, nor so to be its very life blood as pride. The lust of the flesh is strong, but there are respites from its workings; unbelief is powerful, but there are times when it seems to lie dormant; covetousness is ensnaring, but there is not always a bargain to be made, or an advantage to be clutched. These sins differ also in strength in different individuals. Some seem not much tempted with the grosser passions of our fallen nature; others are naturally liberal and benevolent, and whatever other idol they may serve, they bend not their knee to the golden calf. Strong natural conscientiousness preserves many from those debasing sins which draw down general reprehension; and a quiet, gentle, peaceable disposition renders others strangers not only to the violent outbreaks, but even to the inward gusts of temper and anger.

But where lust may have no power, covetousness no dominion, and anger no sway—there, down, down in the inmost depths, heaving and boiling like the lava in the crater of a volcano, works that master sin, **that sin of sins—pride!** As Rome calls herself the Mother and Mistress of all the churches, so is Pride the Mother and Mistress of all the sins; for where she does not conceive them in her ever-teeming womb, she instigates their movements, and compels them to pay tribute to her glory.

The origin of evil is hidden from our eyes. Whence it sprang, and why God allowed it to arise in his fair creation, are mysteries which we cannot fathom; but thus much is revealed, that of this mighty fire which has filled hell with sulphurous flame, and will one day involve earth and its inhabitants in the general conflagration, the first spark was pride!

It is therefore emphatically the devil's own sin; we will not say his darling sin, for it is his torment, the serpent which is always biting him, the fire which is ever consuming him. But it is the sin which hurled him from heaven and transformed him from a bright and holy seraph into a foul and hideous demon. How subtle, then, and potent must that poison be, which could in a moment change an angel into a devil! How black in nature, how concentrated in virulence that venom, one drop of which could utterly deface the image of God in myriads of bright spirits before the throne, and degrade them into monsters of uncleanness and malignity!

Be it, then, borne in mind that the same identical sin which wrought such fearful effects in the courts of heaven was introduced by the Tempter into Paradise. "You shall be as gods," was the lying declaration of the father of lies. When that declaration was believed, and an entrance thus made

into Eve's heart, through that gap rushed in pride, lust, and sinful ambition. The fruit of the forbidden tree was "pleasant to the eyes;" there was food for lust. It was a tree "to be desired to make them wise;" there was a bait for pride. "They would be as gods;" there was a temptation to sinful ambition. The woman tempted the man, as the serpent had tempted the woman; and thus, "by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." (Rom. 5:12.)

There are sins which men commit that devils cannot. Unbelief, infidelity, and atheism, are not sins of devils; for they believe and tremble, and feel too much of the wrath of God to doubt his threatenings or deny his existence. The love of money is a sin from which they are exempt, for gold and silver are confined to earth, and the men who live on it. The lusts of the flesh in all their bearings, whether gluttony, drunkenness, or sensuality, belong only to those who inhabit tabernacles of clay. But pride, malignity, falsehood, enmity, murder, deceitfulness, and all those sins of which spirits are capable, in these crimes, devils as much exceed men as an angelic nature exceeds in depth, power, and capacity a human one.

The eye of man sees, for the most part, only the grosser offences against morality; it takes little or no cognisance of internal sins. Thus a man may be admired as a pattern of consistency, because free from the outbreaks of fleshly and more human sins, while his heart, as open to God's heart-searching eye, may be full of pride, malignity, enmity, and murder, the sins of devils. Such were the scribes and pharisees of old; models of correctness outwardly, but fiends of malice inwardly. So fearful were these holy beings of outward defilement, that they would not enter into Pilate's judgment-hall, when at the same moment their hearts were

plotting the greatest crime that earth ever witnessed—the crucifixion of the Son of God!

All sin must, from its very nature, be unspeakably hateful to the Holy One of Israel. It not only affronts his divine Majesty and is high treason against His authority and glory, but it is abhorrent to His intrinsic purity and holiness. It is, indeed, most difficult for us to gain a spiritual conception of the foul nature of sin as viewed by a Holy Jehovah; but there are, perhaps, times and seasons when, to a certain extent, we may realize a faint idea of it. It is when we are favored with the presence of God, see light in his light, and have the mind of Christ. *Then* how do we feel towards our base backslidings and filthy lusts? With what eyes does the new man of grace then view his sinful yoke-fellow—that base old man, that body of sin and death, that carnal mind in which dwells no good thing, that heaving reeking mass of all pollution and abomination, which he is compelled to carry about with him while life lasts? He views it, how can he but view it, except with loathing and abhorrence. But what is this, for the most part, short and transient, and, in its very nature, weak abhorrence of evil, compared with the enduring and infinite hatred of God against sin, though it may aid us in obtaining a dim and faint conception of it?

But among all the evils which lie naked and open before the eyes of Him with whom we have to do, pride seems especially to incur His holy abhorrence; and the outward manifestations of it have perhaps drawn down as much as, or more than, any other sin, his marked thunderbolts. His unalterable determination against it, and his fixed resolve to bring down to the dust every manifestation of it, is no where so pointedly or so fully declared as in that striking portion of Holy Writ which forms the second chapter of the Prophecies of Isaiah. And this is the theme of the whole, "And the

loftiness of man shall be bowed down, and the haughtiness of men shall be made low; and the Lord alone shall be exalted in that day." (Isaiah 2:17.)

But, besides these general declarations, the sacred record teems with individual instances of God's anger against this prevailing sin. Pride cost Sennacherib his army and Herod his life; pride opened the earth to Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, and hung up Absalom in the boughs of an oak; pride filled the breast of Saul with murderous hatred against David, and tore ten tribes at one stroke from the hand of Rehoboam. Pride drove Nebuchadnezzar from the society of his fellow-men, and made him eat grass as oxen, and his body to be wet with the dew of heaven, until his hairs were grown as eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws.

And as it has cut off the **wicked** from the earth, and left them neither son nor nephew, root nor branch, so it has made sad havoc even among **the family of God**. Pride shut Aaron out of the promised land; and made Miriam a leper white as snow; pride, working in the heart of David, brought a pestilence which cut off seventy thousand men; pride carried captive to Babylon Hezekiah's treasure and descendants, and cast Jonah into the whale's belly, and, in his feelings, into the very belly of hell. It is the only source of contention; (Prov. 13:10;) the certain forerunner of a fall; (Prov. 16:18;) the instigator of persecution; (Psalm 10:2;) a snare for the feet; (Psalm 59:12;) a chain to compass the whole body; (Psalm 73:6;) the main element of deceitfulness; (Jer. 49:16;) and the grave of all uprightness. (Hab. 2:4.) It is a sin which God especially abhors, (Prov. 8:13, 16:5,) and one of the seven things which he abominates; (Prov. 6:17;) a sin against which he has pronounced a special woe, (Isaiah 28:1) and has determined to stain it, (Isaiah 23:9,) to abase it, (Dan. 4:37,) to mar it,

(Jer. 13:9,) to cut it off, (Zech. 9:6) to bring it down, (Isaiah 25:11,) and lay it low (Prov. 29:23.)

Pride was one of the crying sins of Sodom, (Ezek. 16:49), desolated Moab (Isaiah 16:6, 14,) and turned Edom, with Petra, its metropolis, into a land where no man should dwell, and which no man should pass through. (Obadiah 3, 4, 9, 10; Jerem. 49:16-18.)

But pride is not content with her dominion over the children of this world (Job 41:34), her native born subjects and willing slaves, among whom she rules with lordly sway, at once their tormenting mistress and adored sovereign. Not only does she set up her worship in every family of the land, and reigns and rules as much among the low as the high, swelling the bosom of the blind beggar who holds his hat for a half-penny as much as of that high-born dame who, riding by in her carriage, will not venture to set the sole of her foot upon the ground for delicateness and tenderness. Not only does pride subject to her universal influence the world of which Satan is god and prince, but she must needs intrude herself into the Church of Christ, and exalt her throne among the stars of God.

She comes indeed here in borrowed garb, has put off her glittering ornaments and brave attire, in which she swells and ruffles among the gay flutterers of rank and fashion; and with demure looks, and voice toned down to the right religious key, and a dialect modeled after the language of Canaan, takes her seat among the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty, much as Satan stood up among the sons of God. (Job. 1:6.) And as she has put off her apparel, so has she changed her title, assuming that which shall give her the readiest and most unquestioned passport. "Humility" is the name with which she has newly christened herself; and,

slipping into the camp by the most lowly portal, she moves onward, aiming at no lower seat than the throne, and no less weapon than the scepter.

Some, however, of Zion's watchmen, and no one more than the writer of the work before us, have lifted up her veil, found out her real character, and, having first branded her on the forehead, "**SPIRITUAL PRIDE**," have labored hard, though hitherto ineffectually, to cast her out of the congregation of the saints. But as all their labors have hitherto been ineffectual, and she still dwells in our midst, it may be well to **describe some of the features of this dangerous intruder.**

1. Ignorance, and that worst species of it—ignorance of one's own ignorance—is evidently a main feature in her face. In this point she wonderfully resembles that stolid brother of hers who is so much in every company—worldly pride. We are all ignorant, sadly ignorant of everything that belongs to our peace; but the first step out of ignorance is to be conscious of it. No people are so thoroughly impracticable, so headstrong, so awkward to deal with, so deaf to all reason, so bent on their own will and way, so self-conceited, and so hopelessly disagreeable, as those unhappy people, whether in the world or in the church, who are ignorant of their own ignorance. Touchy, sensitive, quarrelsome, always grumbling and complaining, unable to lead and yet unwilling to follow, finding fault with everything and everybody, tyrannical where possessed of power, though abject enough where any advantage is to be gained, bungling everything they do and yet never learning to do any better, making up in a good opinion of themselves for the general ill opinion of them by others—such people are the plague of families, workshops, churches, and congregations. When people of this stamp become, as it is called, religious, being all the time really

destitute of grace, their pride runs in a new channel, and with a strength in proportion to the narrowness of the banks. In them we see the disease at its height.

But there are many of **the Lord's people** who exhibit strong symptoms of the same evil malady. Yet what can be more opposed to grace or to the spirit and example of Him who said, "Learn of me, for I am gentle and humble in heart?" Where the true light shines into the soul there is a discovery of the greatness and majesty of God, of his holiness, purity, power, and glory; and with this there is a corresponding discovery of our own nothingness, insignificance, sinfulness, and utter worthlessness. This divine light being accompanied by spiritual life, there is raised up a tender conscience as well as an enlightened understanding. Thus is produced self-abasement, which every fresh discovery of the holiness of God and of our own vileness deepens and strengthens. This lays the foundation for true humility; and when God's mercy meets man's misery, and Christ is revealed to the soul, it cannot too much abase itself before his blessed Majesty, nor lie low enough in the dust of self-loathing and self-**abhorrence. Humility is the daughter of grace, as pride is the child of ignorance.**

2. Another marked feature in this impostress, is her **self-deceptiveness**. She may not succeed in deceiving others, but she rarely fails in deceiving herself. Thus she usually hides her real character most from those who are under her special influence. They are 'patterns of humility' externally to others—and patterns of humility internally to themselves. Sweet is the incense which regales their nostrils from the admiration of others; but sweeter far is the odor of **their own admiration of themselves**. Other sins are not so self-deceptive, so self-blinding, so self-bewitching. Sensual thoughts, blasphemous or rebellious imaginations, anger,

carnality, prayerlessness, deadness, coldness, unbelief—these and similar sins wound conscience, and are, therefore, at once detected as essentially evil.

But the swellings of spiritual pride, though not hidden from a discerning eye and a tender conscience, are much concealed from those very religious people whose 'amazing humility' and undeviating obedience are ever sending forth a sweet savor to delight their approving nostrils.

3. The grossness and universality of her appetite is a no less prominent feature. Other sins feed only on a limited and appropriate diet. Covetousness is confined to the love of money; sensuality, drunkenness, gluttony, to their peculiar gratifications. But **pride is omnivorous!** To her greedy appetite, no food comes amiss. Like the eagle, she can strike down a living prey; or, like the vulture, banquet on putrid carrion. Some are proud of their knowledge, others of their ignorance; some of their consistency, others of their freedom from all tight restraints; some of their gifts, others of their very graces; some of their ready speech, others of their prudent silence; some of their long profession, others of their deep experience; some of their Pharisaic righteousness, others of their Antinomian security.

The minister is proud of his able sermons; the deacon of his wise and prudent government; the church member of his privileges above the rest of the congregation. Some are proud because they attend to the ordinances, others because they are not tied up in the yoke of church discipline; some are proud of the world's contempt, and others of the world's approbation; some are proud of their sophistication and culture, and others of their vulgarity; some of their learning, and not a few of their lack of it; some of their boldness to reprove, and others of their readiness to forgive; some of

their amiability, and others of their austerity; some because others think well of them, and others because nobody thinks well of them, **but themselves.**

Thus, as some weeds flourish in every soil, and some animals feed on every food, so does **pride flourish in every heart**, and feast on every kind of food. When an apostle was caught up into the third heaven, pride assailed him as soon as he came back to earth, so that it was needful for a thorn to be given him to rankle in his flesh for the remainder of his life, in order to let out its venom. Pride would have been too much even for Paul's grace, but for this messenger of Satan daily to buffet him. Pride set the twelve disciples to argue who would be the greatest; and pride widened, if it did not originate, the breach between Paul and Barnabas.

Pride was the pest of the first Christian churches as well as of our own. The pride of gifts was the besetting sin of the Corinthian church; the pride of legal observances the sin of the Galatian church, the pride of vain philosophy of the Colossian church. Timothy was not to allow novices to preach, for pride was their besetment; and he is especially cautioned against those who will not consent to wholesome words as being "proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof comes envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness." (1 Tim. 6:4, 5.)

None are exempt from pride's baneful influence. She works in the highest Calvinist as well as in the lowest Arminian; swells the bosom of the poorest, most illiterate dissenting minister, as well as puffs up the lawn sleeves of the most lordly bishop. And, what is far worse, even in those who know, love, and preach the truth, spiritual pride often sets

brother against brother, friend against friend, minister against minister. She is full of cruel jealousy and murderous envy, greedily listens to the slanderous tales of whisperers and backbiters, drinks down flattery with insatiable thirst, measures men's grace by the amount of their approbation, and would trample in the mire the most honored of God's servants, that by standing upon them she might raise herself a few inches higher!

The very opposite to charity, pride is not patient, and is never kind. She always envies, and ever boasts of herself. She is continually puffed up, always behaves herself rudely, is ever self-seeking, is easily provoked, perpetually thinks evil of others, rejoices in the iniquity of others, but never rejoices in the truth. She never bears with others, believes nothing good in a brother, hopes nothing good for others, and endures nothing. She is ever restless and ever miserable, tormenting herself and tormenting others, the bane of churches, the fomentor of strife, and the extinguisher of love.

May it be our wisdom to see, our grace to abhor, and our victory to overcome pride!

"I hate pride and arrogance." Proverbs 8:13

"The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished." Prov. 16:5