

The Poison of Pride

Proverbs 16:18

As many of you are aware Marshmallow peeps are among my favorite holiday treats. Some have suggested and enjoy warming them up in the microwave oven. They like to peer through the little window and watch it increase in size. Some are even entertained by watching it explode into a gooey mess. Either I'm not that curious or I don't relish the idea of wasting a good Marshmallow peep or I don't want to clean up the mess of splattered goo. Cleaning the microwave oven after a baked bean explosion is enough for me.

Our verse for today talks about the destruction of those who get too puffed up. Let me illustrate with one of baseball's greatest players.

He was a natural athlete in High school starring in basketball, football and baseball. But it was football that almost ended his life. After getting kicked in the knee, he contracted an infection that developed into osteomyelitis, a disease that only a few years earlier would have killed him. But with the creation of penicillin he lived so that he could continue playing baseball, the sport he loved. His osteomyelitic condition spared him from military service but fans thought it highly suspicious that the year in which he was given a medical exemption from the military he should also be selected to the All-Star game. He was not very popular in 1952.

Few ballplayers have ever played the game as he did. Many sportswriters have indicated that he was one of the best switch hitters of all time and is still thought of as one of the greatest players in baseball history. Home runs were hit like missiles and cautious infielders would take a few steps back because of his raw power. Yet even with such batting strength his speed was considered to be as graceful as a cheetah. His rocket like throwing arm kept many a base runner in check. In every respect he was a complete player.

During spring training at age 19 this farm boy from Oklahoma hit 9 home runs in 11 games. The media dubbed this sandy haired kid as the next Babe Ruth. Even before he played a single game in the Major leagues he was being declared a shoo-in for the Hall of Fame. It wasn't very long that this young man with the thick arms and southern drawl began to swagger. Baseball became too easy for him. His great talent was equally matched with a new 'tude,' and his first season hadn't even started.

There's a big difference between looking good in spring training and performing well over the long haul. Swagger won't get it done. It never has and it never will.

So it was during spring training that he received a post card from home: "Mickey, now that you've made the headlines, why not settle down and make the team. Strut less and focus more. Love, Dad." And so began the career of Mickey Mantle.

I like the simple wisdom coming from the man Mickey deeply loved and admired – "strut less and focus more." Unfortunately much of his career and life were destroyed by alcoholism. In reading his biography you get a glimpse into the swagger that destroyed his family as his wife and 4 sons each battled with alcoholism and substance abuse. If there is a redeeming moment in the life of one of baseball's greatest players it came around 1994 during a visit with former teammate Bobby Richardson. He was an ordained Baptist minister who shared his faith with Mickey and led him to Christ. We'll only know for sure in heaven.

This story is a fitting comparison to our verse for today in **Proverbs 16:18** where I invite you to turn.

Think with me about these three points today from our passage:

The posturing of pride

The peril of pride

The prevention of pride

I. THE POSTURING OF PRIDE

“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall.”

The Message – **“First pride, then the crash-- the bigger the ego, the harder the fall.”**

Posturing means the position of your body; it is the attitude of the mind or assuming an attitude merely for affect.

Pride is an over high opinion of one's self; an exaggerated self-esteem. In a word it is conceit or arrogance. It is an excessive belief in one's worth, merit, superiority and so on. Along with it can be the desire to be admired by others for one's achievements, appearance or acquisitions. This person boasts openly to others, struts around preening because of one's status. They swagger.

The Greek word is hubris and means extreme pride or arrogance. Hubris often indicates a loss of contact with reality and an overestimation of one's own competence or capabilities, especially when the person exhibiting it is in a position of power. It was used in ancient Greek to refer to actions that humiliated and shamed the victim for the sole purpose of bringing pleasure or gratification to the abuser in order to exalt one's position. The ultimate exhibition of pride over someone was to ignore a person burial rites.

Today, as we have seen, it is associated with a lack of humility and often implies that suffering or punishment will follow. The verse we are considering is thought to summarize the modern use of hubris or pride. The word is also referred to as “pride that blinds,” as it often causes one accused of pride to act in a foolish way that goes against common sense. In essence it is thought of as “pride that comes just before the fall.”

Ian Kershaw has written a two-volume biography on the life of Adolf Hitler. The titles in and of

themselves are telling. The first volume is titled *Hubris* and the second is titled *Nemesis*. The first volume describes Hitler's early life and rise to power. The second volume details his role in World War II and concludes with his fall and suicide.

“Pride goes before destruction...”

A person with pride exalts himself over everyone else and will often do what is necessary to maintain that posturing without considering the consequences that may come to him as a result, so blinded are they by their pride.

You may already have in mind someone who epitomizes those characteristics. Maybe just the mere thought of them or the mention of their name brings a sick feeling to your stomach. We see it exhibited in so many different people around us. Examples abound.

When I worked in Ann Arbor I played on the men's volleyball team for the company. We were pretty good and played in the men's A division. There was a guy working for the company we approached to play on the team but he declined the invitation. He said he was too good to play on our team because he was far better than any of the rest of us. We were beneath his skills. That's pride.

Maybe you know such a person.

We saw a couple of weeks ago from **Proverbs 6:16** that among the things the Lord hates, haughty eyes or a proud look is listed first.

Proverbs 11:2 “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.”

Proverbs 21:24 “The proud and arrogant man – “Mocker” is his name; he behaves with overweening [excessive] pride.”

Isaiah 2:11-12 “The eyes of the arrogant man will be brought low; the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. The Lord almighty has a day

in store for all the proud and lofty, for all that is exalted (and they will be humbled)."

Micah 2:3 "I am planning disaster against this people, from which you cannot save yourselves. You will no longer walk proudly, for it will be a time of calamity."

The forecast for the proud is destruction. The Lord will see to it. That he mocks others shows that he thinks he is superior to them. It is an attitude that is loathsome to God and to others.

Pride puffs up.

The prideful person always builds himself up in some way to make himself look better than he really is to those around him. He is a legend in his own mind

He thinks he is the best.

He thinks his way is always the best way and won't consider any other way.

He is unwilling to listen to advice or to change behavior.

Recently I had lunch with a friend who shared some very heart breaking news about a mutual acquaintance who was part of his church. This person had his own business and became very successful. He also became prominent in the church. Through his business many people were getting saved and began attending the church. He met almost weekly with the Pastor for several years to be mentored and was growing spiritually. He himself began leading Bible studies. Unfortunately pride began to enter in as his business and profits grew. My friend said that money began to consume this friend. During one of his meetings with the Pastor, the Pastor shared a couple of areas that he felt this friend should work on. He ignored the counsel of the pastor and became filled with disdain and rejected any further counsel or advice. My friend who was very close to him also attempted to approach him but to no avail. He began to spread some vicious rumors about the Pastor and

eventually led a sizeable group away from the church. Pride and arrogance turned his heart. He was unwilling to listen to advice.

Pride puffs up.

Pride pulls down.

The person with pride is demeaning and demanding, critical and condescending. He wants to be superior. No one should ever dare criticize or confront him and he does not like to be challenged, especially in front of others.

Pride pulls apart.

Pride hurts all relationships.

It wields a destructive blow to families, to businesses, to communities and even to countries. The person with pride often realizes too late, if he ever realizes it all, that his arrogance has in some way caused destruction.

It creates a significant lack of unity within any group of people whether it be a home or church or community or country. It produces divisiveness.

Pride plays favoritism.

They often create cliques and tell others that they are not good enough to play in their sand box. It happens on the playground or cafeteria when children won't let other kids hang out with them. It happens in the class room or on the sports team when you can't be part of the group because you're not one of them. It happens on the assembly line and in a neighborhood and even in the church. Pride is often at the root of our unwillingness to associate with someone. In I Corinthians 1 Paul confronts them about their cliques, the root of which is pride. Pride is the parent of every sin.

Pride is stubborn.

It says it's not my fault. I did nothing wrong. It often will cast blame on others and never accept responsibility or take accountability for its actions.

Pride is impatient.

Pride is unforgiving. To them forgiveness is a sign of weakness. It says that I was right and she was wrong therefore she is the one who needs to apologize. Pride often harbors resentment.

Pride is unloving.

Pride is unkind.

Pride is unmerciful.

Recall with me the story of the servant who was shown mercy for a very large debt, a debt that he was forgiven to pay back. But he would not show any mercy or forgive the debt of another who owed him a few bucks.

Pride is unappreciative.

Pride is unrepentant.

Pride puts up a false front or won't allow people to get too close so they won't see weaknesses or sins.

I don't have any problems. I don't make mistakes.

Pride will even keep you from doing things that God wants you to do.

I won't sing because I don't have a voice like...

I won't teach because I don't have Bible education.

I won't serve because I don't have time.

Pride makes us act or talk in ways that are displeasing to God.

Pride keeps us from doing things we know we should or doing the things we know we shouldn't.

And don't ever think that we're in some way exempt from developing this ugly trait. We can all develop of swagger of some kind no matter who we are. Think about some of the people we admire from Scripture and don't forget their swagger. Moses swaggered when he took the delivery of Israel into his own hands.

David swaggered when he counted the people.

Solomon swaggered with all his wisdom and possessions.

Hezekiah swaggered about his possessions.

Peter swaggered when he said he would never deny Christ.

In his book *Strengthening Your Grip*, Pastor and author Charles Swindoll comments about **Isaiah 51:1** "Look to the rock from which you were

hewn, and to the quarry from which you were dug." In the Hebrew text, the word quarry actually refers to "a hole." The old King James Version doesn't miss it far: "**the hole of the pit whence ye are digged."** Never forget "**the hole of the pit."**

What excellent advice! Before we get all enamored with our high-and-mighty importance, it's a good idea to take a backward glance at the "**hole of the pit**" from which Christ lifted us. And let's not just think about it; let's admit it. Our "**hole of the pit**" has a way of keeping us all on the same level – recipients of grace. And don't kid yourself, even those who are extolled and admired have "holes" from which they were dug.

With Moses, it was murder.

With Peter, it was public denial.

With Rahab, it was prostitution.

The next time we're tempted to become puffed up by our own importance, let's just look back to the pit from which we were dug. It has a way of deflating our pride."

The posturing of pride is an unpleasant and even odious character trait to have and our verse tells us the peril of one who exhibits it.

II. THE PERIL OF PRIDE

"Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall."

When a person develops the 'tude' of pride our verse is quite clear that he or she can expect down the road some kind of destruction to befall them. It's as inevitable as the sunrise this morning or the changing of the seasons. **Why am I so confident that it will happen?** I'm confident because God's Word says it will happen that's why. You will fall.

II Chronicles 26:16 – "But after Uzziah became powerful, his pride led to his downfall. He was unfaithful to the Lord his God, and entered the

temple of the Lord to burn incense on the altar of incense.”

Pride is a sin that God hates, He will not tolerate it and He will judge it.

Daniel 4:1-37 (28-30)

Here is the story of a King, a mighty King who ruled the known world. A vision was given to him of a huge tree under which and in which all living creatures sought shelter and provision from its abundance. It was a magnificent kingdom. Yet the story reveals that this King had a heart of pride. “Look at my great kingdom.” Pride ignores God’s hand in anything that we do or have.

Now after he had his dream before these events had taken place, Daniel warned the king to repent so that judgment would not come on him. But he didn’t listen. Puffed up with his own self-importance he boasted about the kingdom God had given him claiming it was his own doing. God brought judgment on him for his arrogance and he was humbled.

James 4:6 is clear in stating the peril of the proud when it says that **“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”** Those who lift themselves up God will bring down. Just as the sirens sound loudly to warn of a coming tornado so this verse is a clear warning of destruction. We must acknowledge that anything we have or we are, are only possible by the grace of God giving them to us. That’s why Daniel encouraged King Nebuchadnezzar to repent and acknowledge God’s enablement for such a grand kingdom. We must always acknowledge God’s sovereignty.

Psalm 73:1-28

Here is a Psalm in which a godly man looks around and notices the prosperity of the wicked and wonders about the fairness. He looked at how their

heart was filled with pride and saw that God apparently wasn’t concerned about the plight of the righteous who were being oppressed by the proud. It appeared to him that God wasn’t going to punish them. He was envious that they didn’t have burdens or struggles. Life seemed to be a breeze to them. They were healthy and strong. He’s asking God why those who oppose Him seem better off than those who are faithful to Him. He even goes so far as to suggest that they get away with murder. Even though they are wicked and proud, they continue to prosper. On the other hand, it seems like when the people who give their life over to obeying God are plagued and chastened. **Does it look like to you too, that God seems to prosper the wicked but punishes the righteous?**

But then beginning in verse 15, Asaph, the writer of this Psalm recognizes their final destination. He confesses his initial lack of faith with a critical eye on the wicked. He acknowledges that God will set them in places where their feet will slip and they will fall. He then concludes that his own destination is far better than theirs. What the wicked do in their pride won’t last, but what the righteous do will last forever. God will have the final say. He concludes that God is sovereign.

H.A. Ironside wrote: “Pride was an archangel’s ruin, as it has been the destruction of untold myriads of men and women on earth. It is the precursor of a fall, for the High and Lofty One who inhabits eternity cannot permit self-exaltation on the part of a creature, to go unchecked.”

Pride will always lead to a person’s downfall because God is opposed to those who exalt themselves but He will exalt the humble.

We have considered the posturing of pride through its various attitudes and actions.

We have considered the peril of pride through examples that show us how God brings low those who exalt themselves.

Now consider with me the prevention of pride.

III. THE PREVENTION OF PRIDE

If pride brings destruction then what prevents destruction? Not having pride, the opposite of which is humility.

A. The Humble Person Serves

Following his advice to surrender ourselves to God as a living sacrifice, one that is holy and pleasing to God, and then exhorting us to not be conformed to the world but have transformed minds, Paul offers this for us to ponder in **Romans 12:3: “For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you.”** He puts things in perspective regarding how important we may think we are. As believers we’re all part of one body. In essence he says the body is not positioned to serve the individual, but rather the individual is positioned to serve the body. An over inflated view of one’s self has no place in the body of Christ. As we can see through many examples both from Scripture and current culture it doesn’t take much to begin to develop an inflated ego. No one can teach as good as me, no one can preach as good as me, no one can serve as good as me, no one gives as much as me, no one can (and you fill in the blank).

Don’t think more highly of yourself than you should. Instead the proper response to pride is humility. It is in humility that we learn to serve.

John 13:1-5

Philippians 2:3-11

Jesus provides us the greatest example of humility giving us an example of one who served, thinking more about the needs of others than His own. He had every right to demand any one of the disciples to come and wash His weary feet. He was never

self- absorbed in His own position or power to order the disciples to serve Him. Here He is, the creator of everything, the One who hours from that time will offer Himself up for the sins of the world by dying on the cross. He was their master and teacher and yet while they were absorbed in their own importance it was He who took the towel to wash their feet. This was symbolic of the spiritual washing that would take place the next day on the cross and what we see in Paul’s letter to Philippi. The greatest example of humility was when Jesus served humanity by laying aside all He knew to come to earth and die for us, the ones who didn’t deserve a thing.

We may think we deserve other’s serving us, but are we will to serve other instead? Pride says we deserve it. Humility says others deserve it.

A humble person serves.

A humble person submits.

B. The Humble Person Submits

The dictionary defines submission as the act of yielding to the actions, control, or power of another. It’s giving up my will to follow the will of someone else. In the case of humility, it is giving up my will to obey the will of the Lord, to submit to His leading and desire for my life. A person who is unwilling to submit to the Lord is yielding to pride instead.

Again we see from Philippians 2 the example of Christ who humbled Himself before God, submitting to the Father’s authority to do His will to seek and save the lost and He could only do that by coming to live among us so that He could then die for us.

Are we willing to submit to the Lord in doing what He asks?

C. The Humble Person is Unselfish

Matthew 11:28-30 “Come to Me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light.”

I Corinthians 13:4-8a is a great yardstick to measure our attitude of humility. The foundation of a humble spirit is love. “**Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. It never fails...**”

If you want to measure whether or not you have a spirit of humility, test yourself against these traits of love. This will help you determine if you truly are humble in spirit or if there is any pride.

Proverbs 18:12 “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, but humility goes before honor.”

Chuck Swindoll writes “Humility is not how you dress, it is not the money you make, it is not where you live, it’s not what you drive, it is not even how you look. We’re never commanded by God to “look” humble. Humility is an attitude. It is an attitude of the heart. An attitude of the mind. It is knowing your proper place. Never talking down or looking down because someone may be of a financial level less than yours. It is knowing your role and fulfilling it for God’s glory and praise. I repeat, it is an attitude... The attitude Christ had, who emptied Himself of the voluntary and independent use of His divine attributes. There is no quality more godlike than humility...

The place of highest exaltation, as we see in the Lord Jesus Christ, is a place of self-emptying humility. It’s not a phony-baloney style of fake

piety. It’s true humility of mind. It’s putting the other person first...It is being like Christ.”

The person who is proud in no way, shape, or form imitates Christ. In the end the proud will fall, there will be destruction. On the other hand the person who truly humbles himself/herself will be exalted – not by the media or fans or any other kind of self-promotion, they will be exalted by God Himself. God who examines the heart and sees the attitudes and actions of man will humble those who exalt themselves and will exalt those who humble themselves.

May it be our prayer and desire that God would search our hearts and reveal to us any root of pride that may be lingering and develop a heart that loves, for in true love we will become truly humble. After we have submitted to His leading, let’s go out and serve one another. And while we’re at it, let’s strut less and focus more on what God would have us do. God has a way of deflating the ego of someone who is puffed up.