

Chapter 8

PRIDE – A MAJOR STUMBLING BLOCK!

Christianity is for weak people who need a crutch. I'm a good person so I don't need Jesus. I don't need to know anything more about God because I know what is best for my life. Have you ever known anyone that has the opinions just described? I can bet you have because there are probably far more people we come in contact with who hold these views than those who really commit to living the life Jesus wants for us. There are even individuals who attend church on a regular basis who may hold these views in some degree, especially the view that they know what's best for their lives.

I believe the most common reason most individuals fail to seek a deeper or first time spiritual relationship is because they are afraid they may have to give up something they don't want to give up, in other words, they don't want to change. All of these attitudes are a result of pride. Pride causes us to think we have everything under control so we don't need God. Pride also causes us to rebel against God's authority, especially His moral standards, because we don't want anyone telling us how to run our lives, especially if his standards stand in the way of some of our ideas of having fun.

Submitting our lives to the authority of others is one of the hardest things to do for many of us. We want to be in control and do not like it when we are told what to do, even if what we are told to do is for our own benefit. My own daughter will be the first to tell you how very true this last statement is. In fact she said she there was a time where she had a very hard time reading this book because she knew she would not like what she read. She knew deep down inside doing drugs was not good for her, yet she was unwilling to stop because of how good crack made her feel at the time. She told me she knew what she was doing was wrong and she did not want to read anything that would convict her even more about what she was doing to herself.

This same reason explains why many college students abandon or neglect their spiritual growth when they go off to school. All their lives they have been told what to do and how to live and all of a sudden they can do pretty much whatever they want. Add to this the constant opportunities they have to engage in "the desires of the flesh" and it is not difficult to understand why God's authority and standards are questioned at best, and ignored at worse. Church and spiritual growth become less important to many with this new found freedom because they worry that it will only remind them of what they already know, God does have moral standards he wants us to live by.

I would have to include myself in this group because I went through a period when I went off to college where I questioned God's authority, and even his existence. Even though this was many years ago, I know it was my desire to do whatever I wanted, and often what I wanted wasn't what God wanted for me, that was behind my views. What is a real shame is that many of us fail to understand God's authority is for our own benefit.

Rebelling against authority is not only very evident in children, from the very young to young adults, but also is seen in marriages, employment relationships, sports, and many other aspects of our lives. I agree we may sometimes have problems with authority because we have had bad experiences with authority or we have had to deal with authority figures that had a lack of integrity or other weaknesses that keep us from having the respect we should have. But too often the problem is our inflated ego – we think we know a lot more and control a lot more than what we actually do.

Rebelling against God's authority is at the root of what is called the original sin – when Satan deceived Adam and Eve into disobeying God. Satan is very real. Revelation 12:7-9 tells about a war in heaven. This war was due to an angel named Satan, who rebelled against God and led other angels to rebel also. Satan lost this war and was kicked out of heaven along with his followers, and now is very much part of our world on earth. Satan rebelled against God, caused other angels to rebel, and guess what – will try to get us to reject and disobey God.

Satan is the enemy of God and everything God stands for. He is still at war with God on earth and as you will discover in Chapter 11 (Be Prepared for War) we are involved in this war whether we like it or not. We are all driven by something and we choose what we allow to influence (drive) us. Many of our choices either bring us closer to God or they drive us away from God. Without realizing it, we are picking a side, we make a choice who we are going to serve (allow to be driven by) because we can't serve two masters, we will love one and despise the other (Matthew 6:24). We can never be neutral in this spiritual war, we will have to serve one master or the other. When we ignore God, we have effectively made a choice – a choice not to follow (serve) him because in order to follow him we have to know where he wants us to go.

A very important question we need to ask ourselves is – are we ignoring God when we make no attempt to grow spiritually? Satan will try to get you to ignore God (you will then be serving Satan) by getting you to doubt God's word. Genesis 3:1-5 tells us of Satan's successful attempt to get Adam and Eve to disobey God after God specifically gave them instructions to not eat from one particular tree in the Garden of Eden. In this story Satan poses this question to Eve – “Did God really say you must not eat from any tree in the garden?”. In other words Satan's method was to cast doubt on God's instructions. Then Satan throws in his own spin, a spin that appeals to mankind. He tells Eve that if she eats the forbidden fruit she will be like God, knowing good from evil. It is very revealing that Satan caused man's original sin by effectively telling him he doesn't need God to know what's right and wrong because nothing has changed, he still deceives the world with the same lie.

Pride makes us think we know what is right and wrong and too often makes us think we are right when we are wrong. Chapter 4 (The Only Way) covered this topic in more detail but I will reiterate the major point made in that chapter – we can never be good enough to earn our way into heaven. A prideful person really has a hard time accepting this fact. The more you read your bible the more you will see how often we sin (fail to meet God's standards). If you recall, in Chapter 4, 1 John 1:8-10 stated if we claim to be without sin we deceive ourselves, and we are not being truthful. These verses go on to state if we make this claim of not sinning then we are making Jesus out to be a liar and his word would then have no meaning for our lives. If we didn't sin then why was Jesus referred to as the “Messiah” (a Hebrew word for Savior)? Why save us if we don't need to be saved?

I don't want to spend too much effort in this chapter talking about why we can never be good enough to earn our way into heaven because this subject was covered in detail in chapter 4. I do want to point out the reason why many feel they are good enough is because they have never made any real attempt to understand what God's standards are, including many who attend church, and for far too many they don't want to know God's truths. By ignoring God's truths we can then make our own rules and definitions of what is right and wrong, and we make these rules to justify our self-centered desires.

As I stated in the beginning of this chapter many have no desire to seek God because they are afraid they might become convicted that much of what they do or live for is wrong according to God's standards. They do not see, or want to see, the long-term effects of their pleasure seeking

and/or self-seeking lifestyles. Many who do not really want to know God are the types of individuals who, if they are going to accept any religion or any sense of spirituality at all, it will be one that glorifies man and downplays moral absolutes. These same individuals despise Christianity because it makes them aware of the sin in their lives and they do not want to stop sinning. Many who claim to be Christians (and they may be) are ignoring spiritual growth for basically the same reason. What many don't understand is when they develop a love for God they will want to give up anything they know is against God's will for their lives. They don't understand that obeying God will actually give us more freedom in our lives and not less.

Success can give birth to pride and causes many to ignore God, especially in our prosperous country. Our success, as the world defines success, can cause us to think we are much better than we really are. The world typically judges success by wealth and possessions. According to this criteria Jesus would be considered a failure since all he owned was the clothes on his back. Wealth can cause Christians to become swelled up with pride as much as anyone else. We can be as guilty as anyone of forming our value on what we earn, own, and do. We can think we are pretty great but God's view is far different than ours. God looks into our hearts and sees a very different person than how we may view ourselves. God loves us, forgives and accepts us, but he also knows our true nature.

Revelation 3:17 You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.

Success in obtaining wealth can cause us to credit ourselves too much, and credit God too little. When we do this we are reducing the importance of God in our lives. This is the reason Jesus was effectively saying in Luke 6:24,25 - it's going to get much worse for some who are rich, well fed, and happy. He is warning these types of individuals because they will not look to God to be involved in their lives, they will feel they don't need Him. We can easily lose our motivation to maintain our spiritual relationship with God when everything is going great in our lives for the same reason. Deuteronomy 8:18 tells us to remember it is God who gives us the ability to produce our wealth, yet we like to take all the credit and we too often forget how much God works in our lives.

Pride causes us to credit ourselves too much when things are going well and it also can cause us to blame God instead of ourselves for many of the bad things that happen to us and to others. Ever since the 60s blaming others for our problems has been a popular thing to do. In the 60's people embraced the view that social problems such as crime and poverty were "societies fault", and not the fault of moral choices made by the individual. This became a popular view because many individuals did not want to take responsibility for their own bad decisions and instead they preferred to blame someone else for the consequences brought on by their choices. I agree that our social environment creates peer pressure that can influence our choices, but we can make the choice to not give in to this peer pressure, and many do make good choices even in the worst of environments.

This trend of blaming others has kept many lawyers very busy and has reduced our standard of living because we eventually pay for these legal costs as consumers. So blaming God when bad things happen is a natural result of this mindset. We don't live the life God wants for us and somehow some of us still blame God for the consequences caused by our lack of obedience and for the horrible acts of those who do not follow God. We somehow think God owes us first, and if he gives us what we want then we should serve him.

Chapter 10 (Expect to Win) lists a bunch of scriptures that describe the nature of God. These scriptures state he is a shield for those who take refuge in him, he will give prosperity and contentment if you obey and serve him. They go on to say if you love him he will protect and rescue you, if you trust him he will give you safe pasture, if you call on him he is near, and if you wait on him he will show you his compassion. Do you see a pattern? You should see God works in our lives the most when we seek him first. Unfortunately if we seek him at all it is too often after we have made a real mess of our lives and only then we realize how much we need his help.

Another reason based on pride many criticize or reject God is because God does not fit the image of what they expect Him to be like. Instead of man being created in God's image they must think He was created in our image, a scary thought! Because of an inflated ego there are those who actually think mankind knows better how to take care of the problems of the world than the creator of the universe. It's easy to second-guess a coach or anyone in authority because of our humanity but second-guessing God is giving mankind way too much credit, especially since mankind has done such a poor job in solving our social problems.

It's mankind that has often made a mess of Christianity, not Christianity itself. Many who claim to be Christians have not made the effort to know who God really is and what he wants from them. Those who claim to be Christians but don't really know God are the types of individual non-believers point to and say "see, this is why I don't want to be a Christian". This is why you need to look to the standard the bible sets and not to how other Christians live by these standards when judging for yourself the benefits of a relationship with God. Christians should be the first to tell you we are far from perfect and that is why we are Christians. Often it is pride that just uses hypocritical Christians as an excuse for rejecting God.

Another problem with pride is that it produces a feeling of superiority in us instead of love and compassion for others. This feeling of superiority is not limited to financially or materially successful individuals. For example, racial prejudice among even the poor is often based on a false attitude of superiority. Normally going through difficult times and personal struggles brings people closer to God, if not it is because of a refusal to admit fault. Instead of accepting responsibility for poor choices some opt to blame everyone else for their problems. They are actually saying, "I am so good I can't possibly be the source of my problems". This is the type of individual who will never admit they're wrong. These types of individuals come from all kinds of backgrounds and their pride can make them very difficult to live with, work with, and even play with if they are teammates.

I hope you can now see why pride is dealt with as much if not more than any other topic in the Bible. I hope you can see how it stands in the way of our relationship with God. Pride may not be such a bad word if the word pride is used in the right context. When I attend the graduation of students I have had the pleasure to know I can't resist telling them I am so very proud of them. When my children do something well I enjoy telling them I am proud of them. When pride is used in the bible it is referring to an over-emphasis on self and an under-emphasis on God. This is the type of pride God so clearly hates.

Ps 138:6 Though the LORD is on high, he looks upon the lowly, but the proud he knows from afar.

Humility is the flip side of pride. In order for anyone to improve any aspect of their lives they need to admit they need improvement. Pride, because it makes us think we are better than what we really are, hinders us from taking necessary steps toward self-improvement. One of those steps is listening to the advice of others. Proverbs 12:15 tells us the way of a fool seems right to

him but a wise man listens to advice. Proverbs 11:2 says wisdom comes from humility. How can anyone learn from anyone if they think they already know it all? A wise person recognizes their weaknesses and deficiencies and draws on the knowledge and experience of others.

Pride prevents us from listening to the advice of others and can take away our desire to continually learn and work at getting better at what ever we do. Reality can be a great teacher when it comes to chipping away at our pride. For example, college students, especially student athletes too often learn the hard way what Galatians 6:3 means.

Galatians 6:3 If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself.

Any college athlete who receives an athletic scholarship had to be one of the top players on their team in high school. Often they were far superior in talent than any of their teammates. These athletes may have been so superior to their competition in high school that their limits were never tested. Then in college they have to compete with others who are also superior athletes and a whole new self-assessment begins to occur. They begin to see limitations they may not have noticed before because of the much higher level of competition. If an athlete was really good in high school and is not prepared to mentally face the higher level of competition in college they can be setting themselves up for major humiliation and disappointment.

If an athlete, or anyone else for that matter, doesn't acknowledge their limitations they will never reach their God given potential. Understanding our limitations, including our spiritual ignorance, is a very important first step needed to understand what we have to do to reach our top performance level. Not seeing weaknesses due to pride will keep us from working hard enough as well as keep us from seeking advice and instruction of those who can help us such as coaches, teachers, managers, pastors, and even our peers.

Humility, like contentment, is another one of those words that people often misunderstand. A humble person is not a weak person, a humble person is just someone who is honest, someone in touch with reality. Humility is recognizing that we truly are so far from being perfect and this leads to developing more understanding of others who also have weaknesses (we all do!). We will be less judgmental and more forgiving. A humble person also recognizes what is important to man is not important to God. Jeremiah 9:23,24 tells us not to boast of our wisdom, strength, or wealth but if we are to boast it should be that we know God. You can feel good about yourself and still be a humble person! You need to feel good about yourself because of your relationship with God, not because of what you do, own, or look like.

Humility is what will allow us to put less importance on ourselves and more importance on others. When we think too highly of ourselves then we think too lowly of others. Our goals in life will more than likely be to amass possessions and to improve social status. We will put our needs above the needs of others. A humble, loving person will put the needs of others before their own needs. Romans 12:10 tells us to do just that, to be devoted to one another in brotherly love, to honor one another above ourselves. The following scripture makes this same point.

Phil 2:3,4 Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but to the interests of others.

We are so deceived into thinking possessions make us happy, we think if we have to give up anything to help others we will be less happy. The reality is if you can learn humility your focus won't be so much on yourself, and this will make you view your own problems and priorities differently. Your problems won't seem as bad and you will actually enjoy witnessing the success

of others (instead of envy), in fact you will more likely give of yourself because you will develop a love and a desire to help others. Loving others is very important to God because that is what can change the world. Being truly valuable to others can be one of the most satisfying feelings you experience in life.

Living for self-indulgences gives us little value to the world and this is what most people do. Anyone can live for their selves but not everyone can (or wants to) live to help and serve others. As you mature spiritually you will develop a desire, instead of an obligation, to make a difference in the lives of others and this is what will produce a sense of fulfillment in you that you may not have experienced before. The last two chapters will go into more detail how your increased love will lead to giving you a more fulfilling and satisfying life.

Church should be a place where we should develop humility and a desire to help others. Yet church can be a place where pride is fostered and this pride can cause as much damage in church as it does in keeping people from church. Religious leaders can get caught up in their high positions, causing them to think too highly of themselves while thinking too little of others. Chapter 4 discussed the fact that Jesus often rebuked (pointed out the error of their ways) the Pharisees, the Jewish religious leaders of the day. The Pharisees put a great deal of emphasis on manmade rituals and laws as well as their own very restrictive interpretations of God's laws. They were all into being "religious" while neglecting the purpose of their faith – to bring people closer to God. They became more of a burden than a help to those who they were supposed to serve. There are religious leaders today who are not much different than the Pharisees. They can be guilty of thinking way too highly of themselves while looking down on those they serve. These leaders, instead of encouraging spiritual growth through reading the bible, may demand their congregation look to them for spiritual understanding. This can be a dangerous situation.

Religious leaders who want their followers to look to them instead of the bible for guidance may be involved in cults. These cults claim their religious leader or leaders have special insights to the bible. Some cults claim to understand "secrets" of the bible and these secrets can only be revealed to a select group who have to demonstrate they are worthy of knowing these secrets. The last book of the bible the book of Revelation, is often emphasized by leaders of cults. Revelation can be a difficult book to understand which makes it easier to manipulate. This leads me to state you should not let the few scriptures you can't understand keep you from spiritual growth when there are so many you can understand. The pride of some religious leaders and the leaders of cults makes them think only they can understand God's truths and they will not reveal these truths out of a love for others but as means to manipulate and control. Please understand I am talking about exceptions rather than the rule because the vast majority of leaders in the church are dedicated to serving God, their church, and their community.

Pride may be as or more prevalent in church members themselves than in church leaders. In our society especially we can easily develop a false sense of security about our lives. We have a good job, we become active in church or church related organizations, we have our health, and everything seems to be going just great. It can become real easy for us to start patting ourselves on the back for what we have accomplished, for the work we do in the church, for the money we donate, and even for how spiritual we are. This can be a dangerous time for us. We then start to look to ourselves and not to God. This is what gives birth to pride so God may have to bring us down a notch or two so we keep relying on him.

1 Corinthians 10:12 So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!

When life is going well we really need to be careful we don't develop an attitude of self-righteousness. Revelation 3:17 remind us we are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind, and naked despite our wealth. An attitude of self-righteousness can cause us to be blind to our own sin, can be a real hindrance to helping other believers, and can be a real turn-off to non-believers. For example, we can readily condemn an unmarried couple for living together while we willingly watch sexually explicit movies that cause us to have lustful thoughts which Jesus said is the same as committing adultery (Matt.5:27,28). We may not have problems with sexual morality but we may fall short of having love for others. Are the sexual sins of others much worse than our failure to love? I'm not trivializing sexual immorality because these types of sins can do great damage to our spiritual relationship as well as to ourselves. I'm pointing out we all typically fall short of having the love God wants us to have and loving God and loving others are the greatest commandments.

I'm sure there are areas in our lives we can feel good about but all of us have weaknesses we can be blind to. James 2:10 tells us if we stumble by breaking one law we are guilty of breaking all of it. So we may think someone is committing a big sin while ours are little sins (according to our definition only) but breaking any law is the same as breaking all of it. In Matthew 7:3 Jesus warns us not to look at the speck in our brothers eye while we have a log in ours. Great advice because remember, we all sin (Romans 3:23) and often we are not aware of our own sins but it so easy to spot someone else's.

People want to be loved and not judged! Individual going through tough times will respond to those who they think can relate and definitely to those who really care about them. There are times when we should point out mistakes others are making (Matt.15:17, Gal. 6:1) but we must be very careful not to be condescending and to look down on them.

Romans 12:16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. (also see Romans 12:3)

Our prosperous society gives us the means to help others but at the same time causes us to place too much importance on our wealth. Our prosperity makes it very easy for us to look down on those who do not adopt our same values instead of loving them. In the book of Acts the early church members sold all their possessions to make sure they could take care of their members in need (Acts 4:32, 34). Would any of us do that today? I believe a major weakness of the church today is our unwillingness to part with our possessions to help others. We often justify our unwillingness to help by telling ourselves we deserve all these possessions (pride) while those in need do not.

There may be some truth to the fact that we have made some good choices in life while others have made choices to put them in the position they are in. But this does not change the fact that we are too attached to our wealth and to God wealth means nothing but reaching out to others means everything. We should use our wealth to make a difference in the lives of others instead of trying to impress others and satisfy ourselves with our wealth.

We are all guilty of being prideful at times. So how then do we combat pride. Like everything else- commit yourself to spiritual growth. Learn about what is not important to God as well as what is important to him. Die to self by living for Christ. Jesus in Matthew 18:3,4 sums it up by telling us we must change and be like little children. He states whoever humbles themselves like a little child will be the greatest in heaven.

A little child understands how little they know and how helpless they are. They look to their parents for guidance. They trust and love their parents. God is our father, he knows what is

best for us, he wants us to look to him for guidance, and if we trust and love Him we will put our hope in Him instead of looking to self in order to find peace and fulfillment.



**Though the lord is on high,
He looks upon the lowly,
But the proud he knows from afar.
Psalms 138:6**