

Proverbs

Humility and Pride

Sunday, May 2, 2010

Introduction

I have mentioned before that the first nine chapters of Proverbs differ considerably from the chapters that follow. Not so much in terms of content and purpose, as in form.

In the first nine chapters we have what we would do best to think of as a prologue or introduction to the book as a whole, extolling the virtues of wisdom. Solomon spends a good deal of time impressing upon his son the importance of listening to his words and following the way of wisdom, rather than pursuing a path of folly.

In most of the rest of the book, however, we find what we might call Proverbs "proper", that is, the individual proverbial sayings that we normally associate with the book.

[Illustrate by reading the first few verses of chapter 10 and reading at random in some subsequent chapters]

It would be very difficult to continue from this point forward to do what we have done thus far and go chapter by chapter through the rest of the book. Instead, what we'll do is go theme by theme. We'll take a

prominent theme of Proverbs and we'll collect all the individual sayings that have to do with it, and with the help and blessing of God, we'll gain some wisdom on each of the subjects.

The first theme we will deal with is that of pride and humility, about which Proverbs has much to say.

Pride and Humility

ON PRIDE

The first thing to know is that pride is a sin. Now let's be clear at the outset that there is such a thing as a *godly* pride. The Lord wishes us to boast in him, which is something we *must* do if we are not going to be cowed by the world into accepting every form of deviant behavior that comes down the pike. The late Senator Patrick Moynihan, in a 1993 report entitled, "How We've Become Accustomed to Alarming Levels of Crime and Destructive Behavior," coined the phrase "Defining Deviancy Down". His point in the report is, as the title suggests, that with the increase of criminal behavior, we have redefined deviance, because as crime becomes more and more common, we come to think of it as normal, and it's only the extraordinary crimes, the *unusually* violent or gruesome crimes, that capture our attention.

Well, what he says in particular about crime is true in general about moral behavior. We are defining deviancy down. That's really what's happening today. Things that were once regarded as deviant behavior

are being normalized. Things that not too long ago—within our own lifetime—were not even mentioned in polite society are now being paraded down the street and championed as basic human rights. And we as Christians, who know better, because we've been taught by God, are now no longer permitted to express our dissent, because when we do we are identified as the villains. We are the bad guys. When we say, "God says no" to this or that behavior, we are labeled the deviant ones. The deviant is becoming the normal, and the normal is becoming the deviant. The old immorality is becoming the new morality.

And to stand fast in such times as these, we *must* make our boast in God.

Jeremiah 9:23-24

The wicked glory in their sin and shame. Let us, as God's people, glory in our God and in his righteousness because if we don't, we will be intimidated into silence. We will be intimidated into acquiescing, and even approving of and defending their supposed right to their deviancy, and then perhaps we will even be led to participate with them in it.

Beloved people of God, let us never feel ashamed for taking a stand for God and for his righteousness. Let the wicked be ashamed of their wickedness. They are the ones who should hide their faces in embarrassment. They are the ones who should be ashamed. Instead

of holding a Gay Pride day, for instance, they should hold a Gay Shame Day, and appoint it as a day of repentance. Instead of advocating and publicly exhibiting their sin, let them confess and forsake it and publicly renounce it and seek the mercy of God. Likewise for all those who publicly advocate for shameful behavior. Let them just as publicly renounce it and seek God's mercy.

Make your boast in the Lord! This is a good and godly pride!

But Proverbs has much to say about sinful forms of pride.

Haughty eyes and a proud heart,
the lamp [i.e., *life*] of the wicked, are sin (21:4)

The Lord Hates Arrogance

Pride and arrogance and the way of evil
and perverted speech I hate (8:13)

Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an abomination to the LORD;
be assured, he will not go unpunished (16:5)

There are six things that the LORD hates,
seven that are an abomination to him:
haughty eyes, a lying tongue,
and hands that shed innocent blood,
a heart that devises wicked plans,
feet that make haste to run to evil,
a false witness who breathes out lies,
and one who sows discord among brothers (6:16-12)

A Man's Pride will be his Undoing

Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before a fall (16:18)

The LORD tears down the house of the proud,
but maintains the widow's boundaries (15:25)

On Exalting Yourself

If you have been foolish, exalting yourself,
or if you have been devising evil,
put your hand on your mouth (30:32)

It is not glorious to seek one's own glory (25:27)

Let another praise you, and not your own mouth;
a stranger, and not your own lips (27:1-2)

ON HUMILITY

One's pride will bring him low,
but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor (29:23)

Before destruction a man's heart is haughty,
but humility comes before honor (18:12)

The fear of the Lord is instruction in wisdom,
and humility comes before honor (15:33)

The reward for humility and fear of the Lord
is riches and honor and life (22:4)

When pride comes, then comes disgrace,
but with the humble is wisdom (11:2)

It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor
than to divide the spoil with the proud (16:19)

Jesus also speaks much of pride and humility

- Matthew 18:1-4
- Matthew 20:20-28
- Matthew 23:1-12 (for a contrast, see Luke 18:9-14)

And he offers himself as an example

- Matthew 11:28-29
- Matthew 21:5

Peter

- 1 Peter 5:5-6

Biblical examples of arrogant men whom God humbled

- Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 4)
- Herod (Acts 12:20-23)