

Date: May 22, 2022

Series: *Building Inspection: Things That Tear Down the Church*

Title: *Pride*

Text: Proverbs 6:16-17a; 1 Peter 5:5b

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About ten years ago, our Director of Missions, Ron Blankenship, called and asked if I would be willing to serve as the President of the General Mission Board of the Baptist Convention of Maryland/Delaware.

Now you may be wondering what is the "General Mission Board." Well, it is made up of about 50 pastors and laymen who represent the five or six hundred Southern Baptist church in these two states. The GMB meets four times a year to do convention business.

It sounds boring but back then it was actually pretty exciting work. I had served on the GMB for a while when Ron called and at our meetings:

- We voted to funnel funds to start new churches.
- We brought missionaries to work in areas where the gospel needed to be heard and approved of their salaries.
- We coordinated the ministries of those five or six hundred churches---things like that.

I usually left those quarterly meetings feeling very inspired. It was good to know that in spite of years of infighting, some Baptist Christians could still work together and join the Lord in His work without getting into squabbles over trivial issues.

Well, when Ron called asking me to serve as President, my first response was *"No---thanks, but no---you need a more experienced person for this important volunteer position. There's no way I could be the president of the General Mission Board."* But, about a week later, Dr. David Lee, Ron's boss, who was the Executive Secretary of the BCMD at the time called and asked me to re-consider. When I mentioned my inexperience, he said not to worry because he'd help me get my feet on the ground. And after praying about it a week, I called David and accepted. I served as President of the GMB for two years.

Well, when I entered the BCMD headquarters in Columbia for the first GMB meeting with me as the *"Leader of the Free World of Baptists in Maryland and Delaware"* ---people treated me with a special "red carpet" kind of treatment. The receptionist ushered me right into the office of our Executive Secretary. David rose to eagerly greet me and gave me a special file of important papers---Presidential business---for us to go over together prior to the meeting.

Then, when the actual General Mission Board meeting began, I was shocked to hear that whenever I was addressed it was as, *"Mr. President."* I'm not kidding. I almost laughed the first time they did this---thinking it was a joke---but then I saw they were serious. In their mind set I was indeed, *"Mr. President."* And you know, it wasn't too long before I went from FEELING ODD at being called *"Mr. President"*---TO LIKING IT.

Please don't be impressed---because I very quickly learned that the President of the General Mission Board is really just a glorified moderator. You don't get a limo or secret service protection or anything like that. There's no *"BCMD 1"* airplane. In fact, all I did was use my very limited skills in parliamentary procedure to keep those 50 pastors and laymen on the agenda. It was just tradition back then to refer to the GMB moderator---as *"MR. PRESIDENT."*

But that day PRIDE---this sin that MOST easily entangles us, sprouted in my mind before I even knew it. As I said, I quickly grew to LIKE being called, *"Mr. President."* As that first meeting progressed, I began to look forward to the next time someone would have to address me. I even scanned the agenda to see when a board member might need to call on me and waited eagerly for those two words, *"MR. PRESIDENT."*

Silly I know---It's embarrassing to even think of it now. I hope you won't think less of me! But that's the way it is with PRIDE. Before we know it, we find ourselves neck-deep in it.

Now, if you're visiting with us, I'll let you know that this is the last sermon in a series that I've called *"Building Inspection: Things that Tear Down the Body of Christ."* I felt let for us to do this series because I believe God's vision for us this first year after the *"church lock-downing, social-distancing, mask-wearing pandemic"* --- is to do all we can---relying on Him--- to BUILD UP His church at Redland.

In past weeks, we've talked about things that would make a church FLUNK a "building inspection" --- things like dissension and hypocrisy and greed and idolatry. And I shared my embarrassing "Mr. President" story because today we END our study by looking at PRIDE.

As I prepared for this message I got to thinking---I should have put PRIDE first because in my "humble" opinion the most devastating sin in any church is PRIDE. It infects us all and as I learned back in my General Mission Board days, it is SOOOO easy for us to slip into PRIDEFUL thoughts and actions. Without our knowing it, pride can trip us up. As Mark Galli put it, *"The more we make humility our aim, the more we're tempted to become proud of our motives."*

Okay, before we go any further let's stop and try to agree on an accurate definition of this dangerously deceptive sin.

What exactly is Pride?

Basically, it's AN UNHOLY PREOCCUPATION OF SELF.

To be clear, there IS such a thing as a "holy" pride---a GOOD pride. "Holy" pride is seen in healthy self-respect, satisfaction in a job well done, joyous pride in seeing our teens at Redland graduate---those kinds of things. But the other kind---UNHOLY PRIDE---BAD pride---well that is seen in conceit and egotism. It's an attitude of superiority that manifests itself in ARROGANCE and BOASTING. UNHOLY pride is this assumption that we are somehow better than other people that we are more important than others.

PRIDE CAN EVEN MAKE US THINK WE ARE MORE IMPORTANT THAN GOD.

In fact, that's the kind of pride that entangled Satan and led to his fall. Do you remember how Satan put it in Isaiah 14:13-15? ***"I will ascend to Heaven; I will raise my throne above the stars of God; I will sit enthroned on the mount of assembly---on the utmost heights of the sacred mountains. I will ascend above the tops of the clouds; I will make myself like the Most High."***

And of course, once Satan tripped over his own pride and fell, he successfully led Adam and Eve to commit the same destructive sin. Remember? They ate of the forbidden fruit so they too could be equal to God and as a result their intimate relationship with Him was broken and they were cast out of paradise. Well, since pride can so easily entangle us---it would behoove us to learn to recognize it. So how can we? I mean, how do we know if we are slipping into the grasp of this sin? To help you answer that question, here are some common SYMPTOMS that are found in prideful people.

- Name-dropping
- Mirror-looking---vanity
- A closet full of clothes
- Calling attention to yourself
- Putting other people down
- Choosing friends based on what they'll do to your image
- Talking down to people
- Always having to get your way
- Being constantly critical of others
- Needing to win every argument
- Grabbing credit when you can
- Impatience about having to listen, wait, serve, be anonymous, or be led by someone else

- Not being able to apologize
- Leaving God out of the conversation—spotty prayer life
- Thinking it's always about you.

Anyone feeling a little guilty? Sure, In fact, I'm thinking some of you are *"So vain you probably think this sermon is about you."* And if you think this sermon IS about you---and me---that's because it is. Pride is one of the many ways we ALL fall short of the glory of God.

You know, back in the Middle Ages some priests began to notice they were embracing the sins we have talked about in this series: hypocrisy, greed, idolatry, pride, sowing dissension, and they concluded it was due to the influence of society. This led to the monastic movement where priests---monks---would leave society and live by themselves as hermits in caves or in the desert to escape the evil influence of the world. It wasn't long before they realized that these sins were actually INSIDE them because even when sequestered from society, they found themselves proud and hypocritical, etc. And the same is true of us---all these sins including PRIDE are IN all of us.

Lucado gives us a little example to show this sad fact. He writes, *"Suppose you are in a group photo. The first time you see the picture where do you look? And if you look good, do you like the picture? If you are the ONLY one who looks good, do you still like the picture? If some are cross-eyed and others have spinach in their teeth---but you still look good---do you like the picture? If that's what makes you like it even more, you've got a bad case of pride."*

Anyway, after reviewing these symptoms, I think we'd be prideful if we DIDN'T admit that we are ALL susceptible to this sin! We ALL need God's guidance as to how to break free of pride!
In all humility, everyone say: *"AMEN!"*

With this in mind, let's ALL pause now, as CC says, *"for a Word from our Sponsor."* What does God say about pride in His Word? It says a great deal---but in the interest of time, I've selected only two main texts that I think sum up exactly how our Heavenly Father feels about this destructive sin that so easily besets us. The first is Proverbs 16:16 and the second is 1 Peter 5:5. Stand if able in respect for God's Word as I read:

Proverbs 16:16

16 – There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him: [and the first is] Haughty eyes...

1 Peter 5:5b

5b – All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Now, did you notice---haughty eyes---AKA PRIDE---is the first in the list of seven things that are detestable to God? Pride is foremost. It gets top billing. And then, here in 1st Peter, it says that God "OPPOSES" the proud.

- Why would this particular sin be so upsetting to our Heavenly Father?
- Why would He put PRIDE in the number one slot?
- Why would He oppose those who embrace it?

Well like I said about idolatry last week, our Heavenly Father knows things we don't. For example, God knows:

1. Pride HURTS us.

As Proverbs 16:18 says, *"Pride goes before DESTRUCTION."* And I like the way The Message paraphrases it, *"First pride---then the crash---the bigger the ego, the harder the fall."* The fact is pride always hurts us in big ways---and in little ways.

When this young man, Chinanu Onuaku stepped to the foul line during a recent scrimmage, his teammates on USA Basketball's U19 squad seemed perplexed. Instead of using traditional form, the 6'10" 230-pound forward from

Louisville placed one palm on each side of the ball and held it in front of his waist before hoisting an underhanded free throw that swished through the net. Onuaku debuted the shot in a game at the FIBA U19 World Championship in Greece three years ago. But he'd actually been practicing it since that spring, when Louisville coach Rick Pitino showed Onuaku a video of Rick Barry, an NBA Hall of Famer. Barry made nearly 90 percent of his free shows shooting underhanded. Barry's son, Canyon, who plays for the College of Charleston, also shoots underhanded. Wilt Chamberlain even used it for a while. This underhand foul shot is called "*the Granny shot.*" Some of my Upward players have used it---successfully because they are too short to get enough height on the ball the traditional way.

In 2008, *Discover* magazine interviewed a physics professor about the "*Granny Shot*" and he said: "*The 45-degree arc angle and the natural backspin both increase the odds of the ball going into the net, relative to the more common method.*"

Well, if it's better, why don't more players use it? Players are too embarrassed or too proud—or both. The shot looks silly, and most players would rather miss shots than look like a "granny" and score more points. Pride hurt these Basketball players.

And that's the way it is on the court and off it. Pride never benefits us---it always hurts us---and in far more serious ways than missed foul shots.

A few weeks ago, I heard that when Steve Jobs was first diagnosed with pancreatic cancer it was in the very early stages of this disease. It was operable---he could have survived this cancer that kills most. But he proudly thought he had a better idea for treatment than his doctors. He insisted on treating it with diet instead and by the time he realized that wasn't working---it was too late for surgery. My point is PRIDE hurts us---and God loves us so He doesn't want His children to hurt. The thing He wants most for us is that we would experience the joy of living life as He intended.

This is one reason PRIDE is listed first in this list of sins that God hates most. Before we look at other reasons, let's review some of the ways pride hurts us.

A. It opens the door to other SINS.

You see, a prideful focus on self ALWAYS leads to other sinful attitudes and actions.

For example,

- We give in to GREED when we feel that SELF does not have enough.
- We give in to ENVY when we feel that SELF has not received its due, and honor has gone to someone "less" deserving.
- We often give in to ANGER and a dissension-sowing spirit when SELF is offended.

I could go on, but this is one reason pride appears not just on this list in Proverbs 16 but in every other major list of deadly sins in Scripture. As C. S. Lewis once said: "*There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty of themselves: PRIDE. Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind.*"

Here's a second way pride hurts us.

B. It prevents personal GROWTH.

When we think we have it all together we don't have any motivation to keep learning and growing and developing and changing. Proverbs 10:17 refers to this by saying, "***Anyone willing to be corrected is on the pathway to life. Anyone refusing has lost his chance.***" Or, as someone once wisely put it, "*When the head starts swelling the mind stops growing.*"

The fact is pride keeps us from getting needed help.

- If we have MARRIAGE problems and we won't talk to anyone about it, that's pride.

- When we've got FINANCIAL problems and we don't want to admit it and ask for help, that's pride.
- When we're not cutting it as PARENTS---when we're not making it AT WORK and don't want anyone to know about it---that's pride and it keeps us from getting the help we need.

You see, pride makes us prefer to LOOK smart more than to BE smart. And then,

C. Pride POISONS relationships.

In fact, the root of all conflict and disharmony is pride. As Proverbs 13:10 says, "***Pride breeds quarrels.***" Think about it. When we act out of pride we tend to be demanding and unsympathetic. We become obnoxious and rude---and who wants to be around someone like that? When we shop for friends do we look for proud braggarts? No, of course not.

This old cliché phrase is so true: "*Pride is the only disease that makes everyone sick except the person who has it.*"

Have you ever seen a Pufferfish---maybe in an aquarium or while snorkeling or on *FINDING NEMO*? Here's a picture. As you can see, they are funny looking fish that can inflate into a ball shape. Also known as blowfish, these clumsy swimmers fill their elastic stomachs with huge amounts of water (and sometimes air) blowing themselves up to several times their normal size---in an attempt to scare off their "fish foes."

But that's not their only weapon.

Most pufferfish contain a toxic substance that makes them foul tasting and potentially deadly to other fish. The toxin is also VERY deadly to humans—1,200 times more deadly than cyanide. There is enough poison in one pufferfish to kill 30 adult humans, and there is no known antidote.

Well, like Pufferfish, we can blow ourselves up with pride and arrogance to make ourselves look bigger than we are. And this blown-up pride can become toxic to a marriage, a church, or a friendship. No wonder John Stott once said, "*Pride is your greatest enemy, humility is your greatest friend.*"

I mean, no one enjoys a relationship with a "*Prideful Pufferfish Person*" especially if he is a "*Prideful Pufferfish Presidential Pastor Person!*" Remember, selfless, giving-love BUILDS relationships but prideful selfishness ERODES them.

So many conflicts in marriage and in parenting and in churches would never happen if it weren't for arrogance. Usually, the key to reconciliation is for us to simply swallow our pride.

And if it helps, remember, pride is non-fattening and contains ZERO carbs.

So, God detests pride because He knows it hurts us

- It opens the door to other sins
- It stunts personal growth
- It poisons relationships

---but the main reason God opposes pride is because.

D. Pride makes a relationship with Him IMPOSSIBLE.

You see, it's impossible to become a Christian until you first HUMBLE yourself and admit that you are a sinner and that you can't make it on your own---that you NEED Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

In his book, *Hidden Christmas*, Tim Keller writes:

"Christmas is about receiving presents but consider how challenging it is to receive certain KINDS of gifts. Some gifts by their very nature make you swallow your pride. Imagine opening a present on Christmas morning from a friend and it's a dieting book. Then you take off another ribbon and wrapper and you find it is another book from another friend entitled, Overcoming Selfishness. If you say to them 'Thank you so much,' you are in a sense admitting, 'For indeed I am [overweight] and obnoxious.' In other words, some gifts are hard to receive, because to do so is to admit you have flaws and weaknesses and you need help.

There has never been a gift offered that makes you swallow your pride to the depths that the gift of Jesus Christ requires us to do so. Christmas means that we are so lost, so unable to save ourselves, that nothing less than the death of the Son of God Himself could save us. That means you are not somebody who can pull yourself together and live a moral and good life."

Amen!

This fact is why this old hymn that the choir sang last week is so beloved. Sing it with me:

"When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, My richest gain I count but loss and pour contempt on all my pride."

PRIDE is the wall that will keep any sinner from a relationship with God and God loves sinners, so He hates pride.

Okay, how do we avoid pride?

Or if pride already has us in its clutches, how do we free ourselves?

I want to suggest two basic principles we need to ask God to help us follow.

1. Learn NOT take OURSELVES too seriously.

To defeat pride, we must remember that as David says in Psalm 100:1-3: ***"The Lord is God. It is He Who has made us and not we ourselves."*** And Paul thoughts on the subject are also helpful. In 1 Corinthians 15:10 he says: ***"By the grace of God I am what I am, and His grace to me was not without effect. I worked harder than all of them---yet not I, but the grace of God that was with me."***

So, David and Paul didn't take themselves too seriously. They counteracted pride with the knowledge that anything good that they did was due our almighty grace-filled God. To free ourselves from pride we must follow their example---remembering that as James 1:17 says, ***"Every good and perfect gift is from above coming down from the Father."***

Nothing good is from us---it's ALL from God. To defeat pride, we must not take our SELVES too seriously.

And sadly, as I said last week, this is an issue because we love us our SELFIES. In fact, so many people are taking themselves so seriously that they take so many selfies, that they've developed a new medical condition that orthopedist docs call: ***"Selfie wrist."*** For example, this young woman, Tina Choi, 29, works in digital media promotion. She says a successful selfie can raise the profile and income of her clients. Choi believes selfies are an effective way of sharing a sense of yourself. She said, ***"It's really about telling a story. Where you're at. What you're doing. How active you are."*** But all that selfie-taking started causing tingling in her fingers and wrist and later painful discomfort. She said it felt like a sharp pain in the corner of her wrist and it actually would prevent her from working. She went to see an orthopedic surgeon and he explained his diagnosis: ***"It's a form of carpal tunnel because this hyperflexion of the wrist appears to cause the nerve---to become inflamed and angry. The problem begins when patients constantly hyper-flex their wrist inwards in a rush to capture that perfect angle."***

Tina learned the hard way that we mustn't take our SELVES too seriously.

A second thing we have to do in order to defeat pride is this:

2. DO take the needs of OTHERS seriously.

In other words, embrace the opposite of pride---HUMILITY---and put the needs of other people above your own. Make their needs a priority in your life.

Now, in our culture, this word "humility" is often given a bad rap. I mean, when we think of humble people we think of doormats and people with self-esteem problems. But that's not Biblical humility. No, humble people are not people who are always putting themselves down.

They are simply people that have been empowered by God to love their neighbors the way they love themselves. Humble people don't have inferiority complexes. To the contrary, they are secure in who God made them. In fact, the truth is, humility is the mark of emotionally HEALTHY people whereas pride is the mark of emotionally INSECURE people.

Humility is not about convincing ourselves that we are unattractive or that we are incompetent. It's not about beating ourselves up or trying to make ourselves into nothing. No, humility has to do with a kind of submitted willingness; humility has to do with a healthy self-forgetfulness. Real humility is not thinking poorly of yourself. It's just thinking more about other people. It's getting the focus off my needs, my desires, my hurts, my wants, and putting the focus on what other people need. Think of it this way: Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it is simply thinking less about yourself.

A sad example of a time when someone didn't take the needs of others seriously led to the 1986 Challenger disaster. You may be as old as me and remember seeing it happen on live TV back on January 28, 1986. It was shocking---so hard to watch. Remember, that flight included a schoolteacher named Christa McAuliffe who actually taught school in our area at one time in her life.

Well, the launch had already been delayed a few times. On the night before the new launch date, NASA held a long conference call with engineers from Morton-Thiokol, the contractor that built the Challenger's solid-rocket motors. Allan McDonald was one of the Thiokol engineers.

On the day of the launch, it was unusually cold in Florida---which concerned McDonald because he feared that his company's O-ring seals in the Challenger's big joints wouldn't operate properly at that temperature. Since the boosters had never been tested below 53 degrees McDonald recommended the launch be postponed again. But NASA officials overruled McDonald and requested that the "*responsible Morton-Thiokol official*" sign off on the decision to launch. McDonald refused to sign the request, but his boss did. The next morning McDonald—and millions of people around the globe—watched as a mere 73 seconds into the flight, the shuttle exploded and burst into flames.

After the accident, a review showed the cause of the explosion to be what McDonald had feared: the O-rings failed to hold their seal in the cold temperature. In other words, some people in the know had foreseen the exact cause of failure.

So why---even with that warning---did NASA push on?

Allen McDonald claims that NASA fell prey to the oldest and most basic sin—pride. McDonald said: "*NASA [had become] too successful. They had gotten by for a quarter of a century and had never lost a single person going into space. And they had rescued the Apollo 13 halfway to the moon when part of the vehicle blew up. Seemed like it was an impossible task, but they did it. So how could this cold O-ring cause a problem when they had done so much over the past years to be successful? [All of this success] gives you a little bit of arrogance you shouldn't have---but they hadn't stumbled yet and they just pressed on.*"

Seven people died that day because of pride---because the people in the "NO" didn't take OTHERS seriously.

As you know, we close our service with a time of invitation. The idea is for us to take the time each week after we've studied God's Word to humble ourselves and say,
"God, You made me. You redeemed me. What change do I need to make in my life in light of what You've taught me today? What do I need to do in order to fully acknowledge You as Lord? You're the boss. You're the Creator. I'm the creature. Tell me what to do. Tell me what changes I need to make in my life, and I'll do it."

Let's all to that right now. Let's end this service as we began it – by humbling ourselves in the sight of the Lord.

Pray with me.