

Undiscerned Spiritual Pride

Contributed by Jonathan Edwards

The first and worst cause of error that prevails in our day is spiritual pride. This is the main door by which the devil comes into the hearts of those who are zealous for the advancement of Christ. It is the chief inlet of smoke from the bottomless pit to darken the mind and mislead the judgment, and the main handle by which Satan takes hold of Christians to hinder a work of God. Until this disease is cured, medicines are applied in vain to heal all other diseases.

Pride is much more difficult to discern than any other corruption because, by nature, pride is a person having too high a thought of himself. Is it any surprise, then, that a person who has too high a thought of himself is unaware of it? He thinks the opinion he has of himself has just grounds and therefore is not too high. As a result, there is no other matter in which the heart is more deceitful and unsearchable. The very nature of it is to work self-confidence and drive away any suspicion of evil respecting itself.

Pride takes many forms and shapes and encompasses the heart like the layers of an onion- when you pull off one layer, there is another underneath. Therefore, we need to have the greatest watch imaginable over our hearts with respect to this matter and to cry most earnestly to the great searcher of hearts for His help. He who trusts his own heart is a fool.

Since spiritual pride in its own nature is secretive, it cannot be well discerned by immediate intuition of the thing itself. It is best identified by its fruits and effects, some of which I will mention together with the contrary fruits of Christian humility.

The spiritually proud person is full of light already and feels that he does not need instruction, so he is ready to despise the offer of it. On the other hand, the humble person is like a little child who easily receives instruction. He is cautious in his estimate of himself, sensitive as to how liable he is to go astray. If it is suggested to him that he does go astray, he is most ready to inquire into the matter.

Proud people tend to speak of other's sins--the miserable delusion of hypocrites, the deadness of some saints with bitterness, or the opposition to holiness of many believers. Pure Christian humility, however, is silent about the sins of others or speaks of them with grief and pity. The spiritually proud person finds fault with other saints for their lack of progress in grace, while the humble Christian sees so much evil in his own heart, and is so concerned about it, that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts. He complains most of himself and his own spiritual coldness and readily hopes that most everybody has more love and thankfulness to God than he.

Spiritually proud people often speak of almost everything they see in others in the harshest, most severe language. They frequently say of an other's opinion, conduct, or coldness that it is from the devil or from hell. Commonly, their criticism is directed against not only wicked men but also toward true children of God and those who are their superiors. The humble, however, even when they have extraordinary discoveries of God's glory, are overwhelmed with their own vileness and sinfulness. Their exhortations to fellow Christians are given in a loving and humble manner, and they treat others with as much humility and gentleness as Christ, who is infinitely above them, treats them.

Spiritual pride often disposes persons to act different in external appearance, to assume a different way of speaking, countenance, or behavior. However, the humble Christian, though he will be firm in his duty--going the way of heaven alone even if all the world forsake him- yet he does not delight in being different for difference's sake. He does not try to set himself up to be viewed and observed as one distinguished, but on the contrary, is disposed to become all things to all men, to yield to others, to conform to them, and to please them in all but sin.

Proud people take great notice of opposition and injuries, and are prone to speak often about them with an air of bitterness or contempt. Christian humility, on the other hand, disposes a person to be more like his blessed Lord, who when reviled did not open His mouth but committed Himself in silence to Him who judges righteously. For the humble Christian, the more clamorous and furious the world is against him, the more silent and still he will be, unless it is in his prayer closet, and there he will not be still.

Another pattern of spiritually proud people is to behave in ways that make them the focus of others. It is natural for a person under the influence of pride to take all the respect that is paid to him. If others show a disposition to submit to him and yield in deference to him, he is open to it and freely receives it. In fact, they come to expect such treatment and to form an ill opinion of those who do not give them what they feel they deserve.

One under the influence of spiritual pride is more apt to instruct others than to ask questions. Such a person naturally puts on the airs of a master. The eminently humble Christian thinks he needs help from everybody, whereas the spiritually proud person thinks everybody needs his help. Christian humility, under a sense of others' misery, entreats and beseeches, but spiritual pride commands and warns with authority.

As spiritual pride disposes people to assume much to themselves, so it disposes to treat others with neglect. On the

contrary, pure Christian humility disposes persons to honor all men. To enter into disputes about Christianity is sometimes unseasonable, yet we ought to be very careful that we do not refuse to discourse with carnal men because we count them unworthy to be regarded. Instead, we should condescend to carnal men as Christ has condescended to us--condescended to be present with us in our unteachableness and stupidity.

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