

THE TEACHING LEGACY OF DEREK PRINCE

Pride vs. Humility, Part 1

The theme of “Pride vs. Humility” is truly vast. It spans the whole universe—from eternity, through time, and on into eternity again—from heaven to earth and even to hell. Even so, although this theme is so vast, it also applies in the personal lives of each one of us individually. This eternal, universal law is stated by Jesus in Matthew 23:12: *“For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted”* NIV.

Five Stages of Pride and Humility

To review the history of pride in the universe, we will look at the five main stages of pride and humility.

Stage One: The first sin of pride. The first sin committed in the universe was the sin of pride committed by an angel, not a man. It was committed in heaven, not on earth. The name of that angel was Lucifer, the bright and shining and glorious one. But because of his sin of pride and the subsequent rebellion, he was cast out from God’s presence. It was then that his name was changed to Satan: the adversary, the resister.

Stage Two: Creation. God responded to this first sin of pride by making a creature from dust—Adam, “man.” God stooped down right into the dust to make this creature. He wanted to eliminate any basis for pride from man and from the whole creation.

Stage Three: The fall. Alas, man was enticed by Satan, the adversary, into the same sin of pride he himself had committed. Now, being guilty of pride, man likewise fell.

Stage Four: Incarnation. God had a plan of redemption for fallen man, and in this plan God stooped

still lower. In Christ, He stooped to the very level of fallen humanity. He became one with the human race to lift man up again from his fallen condition to a place of fellowship with God throughout eternity.

Stage Five: Redemption. God made it so that these redeemed creatures—the redeemed members of Adam’s race—would reign with Him throughout eternity in the brightness of heaven’s glory. They would be a demonstration to the universe that God reserves the highest place for the lowest.

Running through the entire record of God’s dealings with His creatures we see this principle: That God exalts the lowly and abases the proud. The one who exalts himself will be abased, but the one who humbles himself will be exalted.

The Essence of Pride

The essential nature of the sin into which Adam fell, into which he was actually enticed by Satan, was the same as Satan’s own sin. It was the sin of pride, leading to rebellion against God.

In Genesis 3:5 Satan presented his ultimate temptation



to Adam and Eve. What was it? To disobey God and eat of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God had forbidden to them. Satan, in the person of the serpent, said to them:

“For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” NIV

The motivation that prompted Satan’s own rebellion in heaven is summed up in the self-exalting statement, “I will make myself like the Most High” (Isaiah 14:14). Subsequently, Satan’s ultimate temptation to Adam and Eve was, “If you eat of this tree of knowledge of good and evil, you will be like God—equal to God.” It is the same motivation, producing the same disastrous consequences—pride that led to a fall.

What is, therefore, the intrinsic nature of pride? It is most important that we see this. I can sum it up in one simple sentence: Pride of this kind is seeking to be independent of God. It was not a denial of God’s sovereignty in the universe. It was simply a personal decision by Adam and Eve that they could do without God. They didn’t need God. If they could acquire the knowledge of good and evil, then they would no longer need to depend upon God. Satan, in his temptation, implied that Adam and Eve were in a position of slavish dependence on God, a position that was not worthy of their potential. According to the tempter, they could be much better off without depending on God.

The Crux: Independence

The essence of this temptation is summed up in one word: independence. It is the desire to be independent of

God. That, in its essence, is pride. Yet it is a satanic pride—the very pride that caused Satan’s fall. Consequently, any life that is not lived out in willing dependence on God is motivated by pride.

This is a very subtle deception. Many people who do not consider themselves prideful are seeking to live their lives without willing dependence on God. The motivation behind that is pride—and the results of pride are always the same: rebellion and disaster.

A Parable of Pride

In Luke 12 Jesus relates a parable of a man who was guilty of just this kind of wrong attitude toward God—a type of independence that is really pride. Unless we are aware of the nature of pride as we read this story, we might miss the real mistake this rich man made. Here is the parable:

And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’ Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do, I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink, and be merry.’” Luke 12:16–19 NIV

Have you ever heard people in our contemporary world speak like that? That really portrays a very common attitude in society today.

Now let’s go to the end of the parable:

“But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

[And then here is the commentary of Jesus:] “This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God.” verses 20–21 NIV

God called that man a fool. Yet he only did what millions of people in our contemporary civilization are doing. He took care of himself. In a certain sense, he was prudent. He was a good manager. He could bring forth a good harvest from his field and when he knew he needed larger storehouses, he was capable of building them. Most people would regard him as a rather respectable, sensible type of man. Frankly, he could be a churchgoer, accepted in many of our contemporary churches. The same attitude is found in millions of professing Christians and churchgoers today.

What was the problem? Why was he called a fool? What was the essence of his sin? Here is my answer: He acted as if he were independent of God. He did not acknowledge the fact that he depended on God for the very breath he breathed, that he depended upon God for his seed to mature and bring forth a harvest, that he depended upon God for health and strength. For everything in his life, he was ultimately dependent upon God. Why was he a fool? Because he failed to see or acknowledge his dependence on God. He tried to live as if it were not so. The root of that attitude is pride. The desire to be independent of God, in itself, is pride.

The New Testament diagnoses this problem very clearly. We see it, for instance, in James 4:

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will

happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that." As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil." James 4:13–16 NIV

That boastfulness is pride—the desire to be independent of God, to act as if God had no real authority over our lives. This is summed up as well in 1 John 2:16 NASB:

For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world.

The boastful pride of life is living as though God did not really matter, living as though God had no claims, no authority. Pride in its essence is seeking to be independent of God.

The Perfect Pattern of Humility

So far, we have looked primarily at the negative aspect of the universal law stated by Jesus: "Whoever exalts himself will be humbled" (Matthew 23:12). Now we will focus on the positive aspect of this law, which is stated in the words, "Whoever humbles himself will be exalted." The greatest and most perfect demonstration of this positive aspect is provided by Jesus Himself. In fact, the contrast between Satan (or Lucifer) and Jesus is exact and complete. Look at it this way: Lucifer, now Satan, sought to exalt himself and was cast down. Jesus, the Son of God, humbled Himself and was exalted.

The picture of the self-humbling of Jesus is beautifully described for us by

Paul in Philippians 2:5–11. I think it is significant that this epistle was written in a prison cell. As Paul was applying lessons he had to learn in his own life, he saw the perfect pattern of these lessons already worked out in the life of Jesus. In this passage, Paul describes two truths: the self-humbling of Jesus and His resulting exaltation by God the Father.

First of all, as we look at the description of the self-humbling of Jesus in Philippians 2:5–8, we see seven successive downward steps that Jesus took—from His place of equality with God to the place of dying a criminal's death on a cross. In Scripture the number seven often represents that which is perfect or complete. So in these seven downward steps, we see the perfect self-humbling of our Lord Jesus.

The beginning words, "Have this attitude," point out that everything begins with the attitude, not the act. First of all, it was Lucifer's attitude of pride that prompted the act of rebellion. It was Jesus' attitude of humility that led Him to His subsequent downward course.

Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus, who, although He existed in the form of God [He was God Himself, equal with God the Father], did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied Himself, taking the form of a bond-servant, and being made in the likeness of men. Being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. NASB

Let's look briefly at those seven downward steps. Step one, Jesus emptied Himself. Charles Wesley, in one of his hymns, says, "He emptied

Himself of all but love." He laid aside all His attributes as a divine person.

Step two, He took the form of a bond-servant. The Greek says "a slave." But He could have been a servant of God and still remained on the level of the angels, for they are all God's servants.

Step three was further down. He took upon Him the likeness of man. He placed Himself on the same level with the Adamic race, the descendants of Adam. Bear in mind, He could have come to the earth in the form of perfection—in every aspect that Adam had before the fall. But He became fully man.

The fourth step down was that He was found in appearance as a man. He was just like the men of His time. He mingled with them on the streets of Nazareth and no one noticed any physical difference.

Step number five, He humbled Himself to be a mere man. Have you ever thought about that? Jesus was not a ruler, not a military commander, not even a priest.

Step number six, as a man He endured the ultimate fate of all men; that is, death. He saw it through to the end.

Step number seven, the ultimate, was death on a cross. Not death on the sickbed with His relatives around Him; not death in the comfort of His own home; but the criminal's death in agony and shame, naked on the Roman gibbet. That was the total self-humbling of Jesus.

Highly Exalted

Now listen to the result. The very next word that follows is a *therefore*. Jesus did not *pretend* to renounce His position as God, He really *did renounce* it. In order to return to it, He had to earn the right. And earn it He did—by

His self-humbling. Paul attests to this in Philippians 2:9–11:

Therefore also God highly exalted Him, and bestowed on Him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those who are in heaven, and on earth, and under the earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. NASB

Notice the seven upward steps. Number one, God highly exalted Him. Number two, God gave Him the name above every name. Number three, God ordained that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. At that point, three areas are specified. Step four, those in heaven. Step five, those on earth. Step six, those under the earth—every area of creation. Step seven, the final one, is that every tongue should confess Jesus as Lord. Bear in mind that word *therefore*, Jesus earned this exaltation by His self-humbling. He was the perfect example of the principle: Whoever humbles himself will be exalted.

Humility Outworked

As we continue with the next verses from Philippians 2:12–15, I want you to notice the first word is again *therefore*. There is another outworking of this principle that applies specifically to our lives.

Therefore, my dear friends, as you have always obeyed—not only in my presence, but now much more in my absence—continue to work out your salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you to will and act according to His good purpose. Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children

of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe. NIV

Immediately after the record of Jesus' self-humbling and His subsequent exaltation comes a *therefore*. What is it there for? It is an application of that principle to our lives. Just as Jesus humbled Himself, so it is with us. If we are to live the Christian life successfully and follow His pattern, we too must humble ourselves. Self-humbling is the essential condition to leading the Christian life successfully as the New Testament pictures it. The same principle that worked in Jesus must also be worked out in us.

There are three results of humbling ourselves stated by Paul in that passage. The first is obedience. Paul said, "Don't obey only in my presence, but much more in my absence." A proud person cannot be obedient. Pride and rebellion can never go together with obedience. We cannot obey God nor those set over us by God as long as there is pride and rebellion in our hearts. We have to humble ourselves in order to obey.

The second result of self-humbling is that it enables God to work in us. Paul says, "It is God who works in you, both to will and to act according to His purpose." Pride is a barrier to God working in us. God can only work His will in those who humble themselves. As long as we remain proud, arrogant, self-sufficient—seeking to maintain our independence of God—there is no way God can work in us. Pride is a barrier to God working.

The third result of humbling ourselves is very beautiful. Humility causes us to shine as the stars in the universe. It makes God's people totally different from the people of this world. A people that stand out, not by their

high attainments or their intellectual ability, but by their humility. That is a quality the world sees very little of today. It certainly makes God's people different when they practice it.

The world is getting darker all around us. Many "lights" that we regarded as secure are being taken from us. The beautiful fact of the night sky is that the darker the night gets, the brighter the stars shine. That is how God wants it to be with us. But the key is self-humbling.

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