



UNMASKING HIDDEN PRIDE

**Pride goes before destruction,
and a haughty spirit before stumbling.
Proverbs 16:18**

By Al Ells, M.C.

Remember the story of Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar who was made to live and eat with the beasts and wild donkeys of the field because of his pride? Daniel 5:21 says, “He was given the mind of an animal. He was given grass to eat like cattle, and his body was drenched with the dew of heaven until he recognized that the Most High God is ruler over the realm of mankind and that He sets over it whomever He wishes.”

I have seen many clergy and leaders end up in turmoil, depression and pain for the same reason that Nebuchadnezzar was humbled—pride.

God chooses his church’s leaders as he sees fit, and He also has the authority to remove whomever He chooses. Judging from the prominent biblical warnings against it, pride is a major reason for God to remove someone from a ministerial role. As James 4:6 says, “God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble.”

John, a pastor friend of mine told me how pride resulted in the loss of his church. “I thought I had to have all the answers and that I knew better than my board of elders,” he said. “When we disagreed, I argued and became irritated and impatient with them.”

Because pride can manifest itself subtly, its telltale signs often go under the radar until it creates a problem as in John’s case. Consider the following characteristics of hidden pride and see if God reveals any of its indicators in your life. Be brave. Ask those who know you well if they’ve seen any of these signs in your behavior.

SIGNS OF PRIDE

INSECURITY

Research has found clergy to be one of the most insecure professional groups. The root of many unhealthy and ungodly behaviors, insecurity provokes us to covet the praise and attention of others.

Because pride stems from an unmet need for self-worth, we must find our identity and security in Christ to avoid succumbing to this sin.

THE NEED TO BE RIGHT

John rarely tolerated other's different opinions. His wife complained her views rarely seemed to count to him, and the kids lamented that Dad always had to be right even when he was wrong. Galatians 6:3 reminds us, "If anyone thinks he is something when he is nothing, he deceives himself." John's need to be right prevented him from appropriately evaluating issues and himself.

People who need to be right have an exalted investment in themselves and think that they know better than others. In religious circles, the need to be right is frequently couched in phrases like, "God told me" or "God showed me."

BEING ARGUMENTATIVE

When someone constantly argues, especially with those in authority, pride has taken over. Such an unyielding person believes his or her will should prevail in every situation. Advocating a point of view is not wrong, but doing so at the jeopardy of reaching a consensus is. This also holds true in marriage. When spouses adamantly argue their position instead of balancing opinion with empathy, pride is the ultimate winner.

MORE INTERESTED IN BEING HEARD THAN LISTENING

John frequently sermonized and didn't give others a chance to easily voice their opinions. He was not good at asking others questions and listening to what they thought. It seemed like he always needed to be heard. Why? Because of pride.

ANGER

Anger is a self-justifying emotion: By nature it justifies its own position and blames others. Self-justification leads to denial of any wrongdoing. James 1:20 says, "The anger of man does not accomplish the righteousness of God." A habitually angry person is doubtless suffering from pride.

IRRITABILITY AND IMPATIENCE

I recently asked a friend to pray for my increasing irritability around my family. He asked me point-blank, "What is so much more important about your life than theirs?" Ouch. He was right. My impatience demonstrated a haughty view of self. Thinking my views, my time or my needs are of paramount importance points to pride in me, not imperfections in others.

LACK OF SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE

Submission is the voluntary placement of oneself under the authority of another. When someone has submitted to another, yet criticizes or argues with that authority, pride is at the root. John said that he submitted to his elder board, but his hostility toward them told a different story. The test of humility and submission is being obedient, maintaining a positive attitude and trusting God for the outcome.

NOT EASILY CORRECTED

Do you know someone who can't receive corrective feedback? John couldn't. If he had listened to his elder board and accepted feedback, he may not have been dismissed. Pride kept him from humbling himself, admitting wrong and taking correction.

Another Phoenix-area pastor, who died recently, was noted for being easily entreated and able to receive corrective feedback from others. He would thank the person for the negative input and commit to pray about it, seek counsel and get back to that person with his conclusions. He was a role model for many of us.

NEEDING TO BE VALUED, APPRECIATED OR RECOGNIZED

A friend of mine requires everyone to call him "pastor," saying that he has deservedly earned the title. Demanding that others call you by any title only undermines the prominence of such an honor. All it serves to do is build a false sense of importance while taking others down a notch. Let others honor you out of their own choice to do so. Making it a requirement is only pride taking hold.

A variation of this symptom is the need to have others take your advice. Counselors—including me—easily fall into the trap of needing to be needed. It feels good when other act upon your advice, however, counsel should always be offered without strings attached. If you find yourself resenting the fact that your advice is not followed, look deeper at your motivations for offering it in the first place.

BEING STUBBORN

Webster's dictionary defines stubbornness as "unduly determined to exert one's own will, not easily persuaded and difficult to handle or work, resistant." The root issue of stubbornness is willfulness. In other words: "I want what I want when I want it." It is the same thing as pride.

COMPARISONS AND COMPETITION

2 Corinthians 10:12 clearly states that it's unwise to compare oneself with others. Comparison is a form of competition. John was constantly emphasizing the attendance and number of converts within his mega-church, and would inwardly grieve when another church would grow or experience success.

Unmasking hidden pride can be uncomfortable, but it is necessary.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." (1 John 1:9)