

Sermon Summary #7

Proverbs on Pride and Passion Proverbs 16:5

I want to paint a mental picture for you this morning, a picture that begins in beauty but concludes in ugliness. It's a beautiful day. The sun is shining. Not a cloud in the sky. A gentle breeze is blowing. A young teen-aged boy is standing on the tee box of the fourth hole at the Elks golf and country club in Duncan, Oklahoma. It's a short but scenic par three, some 150 yards over a small pond. He takes out his eight iron and deftly strikes the ball, leaving it only five feet from the hole.

Moments later he is standing over what he believes will be a certain birdie putt. He has carefully examined the break of the green. Confident of the speed required, he gently strikes the ball. Alas, it careens to the left and misses the hole. The young teen-aged boy then transforms what had been a beautiful experience into an ugly display of sinful immaturity. He takes his putter in hand and with a verbal burst of unimaginable profanities together with the energy of an Olympic athlete hurls it some fifty yards in the sky, watching angrily as it plummets into the pond, slowly sinking to the bottom, where, I suppose, it still resides today, some forty-five years later.

Yes, just in case you were wondering, this story is indeed *autobiographical*! There were on display that day *two sins*, perhaps more, but two that are the focus of our time today in the book of Proverbs: **arrogance and anger; pride and passion**. There's simply no getting around the inescapable fact that I acted like a complete fool that day, an immature, arrogant, angry young man who, I hope by God's grace, learned his lesson and has grown up a bit in the years following.

Now, why do I say this young man was immature, foolish, and arrogant? The anger part is obvious, but why was hurling that putter into the pond a stupid thing to do, an indication of the immaturity of its owner? Well, consider these factors. *First*, the response of that young man was wholly out of proportion to the failure he had experienced. One missed birdie putt hardly justified the ugly display of anger and the destruction and loss of an expensive golf club. *Second*, throwing the putter in the pond couldn't change what had already occurred: it didn't magically transform his par back into a birdie. *Third*, it only served to disrupt the remainder of the round of golf he was playing. Indeed, he remained upset through the next fourteen holes he was required to play. Have *you* tried putting with a driver? *Fourth*, his sin was put on display for all to see. *Fifth*, his reputation was damaged. *Sixth*, it proved quite costly from a financial point of view, for he was required to purchase another putter to replace the one lying silently at the bottom of the pond. *Seventh*, the incident served only to alienate him from his friends and playing partners. *Eighth*, it likely would lead to even worse behavior. After all, if such a stupid reaction was provoked by something as comparatively meaningless as a missed birdie putt, how would he react when events of even greater adversity came his way?

I wish I could tell you that this was a singular, one-time incident that never occurred again, but alas. In fact, only a few years earlier the same young man had exploded in arrogance and anger at the Midland, Texas, country club and was summarily suspended from playing there for a time, a fact that his older sister often brings up in conversation to remind him of how badly he had humiliated her: "Oh, you're the one whose younger brother made a fool of himself and got suspended from the golf course!"

Would that this young man had known something of the wisdom of Proverbs before he ventured out onto the golf course that day. Would that he might have understood the foolish nature of arrogance and anger, of pride and uncontrolled passion, and of the destructive consequences of both. **Well, today that same young man who is now considerably older will look with you at what Proverbs has to say about both sins.**

Pride

“Pride,” wrote Jonathan Edwards, “is the *worst* viper that is in the heart; it is the *first* sin that ever entered into the universe, and it lies *lowest* of all in the foundation of the whole building of sin, and is the most secret, deceitful and unsearchable in its ways of working, of any lusts whatsoever; it is ready to mix with everything; and nothing is so hateful to God, and contrary to the spirit of the Gospel, or of so dangerous consequence; and there is no one sin that does so much let in the Devil into the hearts of the saints, and exposes them to his delusions” (*The Great Awakening*, 277-78).

Do you think that’s an overstatement, an exaggeration crafted for purely rhetorical purposes? If so, you haven’t considered what God’s Word says about the sin of pride.

The first thing, indeed the most important thing, that we need to understand about pride is that ***God hates it!*** Lest you think that’s too harsh and that I should soften my language, consider these texts:

“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” (Prov. 6:16-19).

“Everyone who is arrogant in heart is an ***abomination*** to the Lord; be assured, he will not go unpunished” (Prov. 16:5; observe that it is not merely the arrogance itself that is an abomination to the Lord; the arrogant *person* also is).

Of all that God hates, of all that is an abomination to him, what is first on the list? *Haughty* eyes, which is to say, prideful, arrogant eyes! “Haughty” eyes does not refer to how a person’s eyes look to others but how a person himself sees or views himself and everyone else. He views them as less than himself, as essentially worthless. He is arrogant and puffed up with his own sense of value.

The word “***hate***” is an unpleasant one that we typically instruct our children to avoid. It vicious, venomous, and destructive. When we experience “hatred” it usually means we loathe certain things, we seek to avoid them, destroy them; we speak ill of them and vote against them; we do everything possible to forget them. Now imagine “hatred” in the heart of God, intensified and multiplied countless times over. We are talking about ***righteous hatred, pure, unalloyed, unmitigated disgust and revulsion***. That’s pretty potent, to say the least. Likewise, for something to be an “abomination” to God means that it is a stench in his nostrils; it is utterly repulsive and altogether putrid in his sight. Such is what God feels about pride: he hates it; it is to him an utter abomination.

Is it any wonder, then, that we read in ***James 4:6*** – “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble”? Think about that word “opposes”. James doesn’t say that God simply ignores the proud or avoids them or keeps his distance from them. No, he resists them. He works in open opposition to them. He wages war against them and thwarts them. I trust by now you know that I’m not being unduly harsh or using exaggerated terms when I speak of how God feels about pride. Pride or arrogance is something that provokes God to wrath and indignation; it irritates him, agitates him, and displeases him beyond words.

The other thing that Proverbs wants us to know about pride is that it is a *precursor* to all other forms of sin. That is to say, ***pride is the soil in which all manner of sin germinates and grows***. Consider these statements:

“Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor than to divide the spoil with the proud” (Prov. 16:18-19).

“Before destruction a man’s heart is haughty, but humility comes before honor” (Prov. 18:12).

“Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin” (Prov. 21:4).

“One’s pride will bring him low, but he who is lowly in spirit will obtain honor” (Prov. 29:23).

Notice that before those decisions and ideas that lead to a person’s destruction there comes pride. ***Pride is the fuel and the catalyst for virtually every sin***. When Proverbs 21:4 says that “haughty eyes and a proud heart” are “the

lamp of the wicked” it means that it is through an arrogant and prideful *perspective* that the wicked see everything and make their evaluations. Pride is the light by which they see all of life.

Now, once again, is it an exaggeration to say that pride is the underlying cause of all sin? No, I don’t think so. If you would take the time to excavate your sin, beneath it all you would discover the rotting bones of pride and arrogance. Consider this.

Envy – Envy is the resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another, an advantage that you are convinced ought rightfully to be yours. But why should someone else’s success or promotion or praise provoke envy in our hearts? Why not joy, instead? The answer is because we don’t want others to appear better than ourselves; we are convinced that we are more worthy and more deserving of the advantage than they are. That, dear friend, is pride!

Bitterness – Bitterness is that sour feeling in our souls when someone has offended us or defrauded us or failed to deliver on what we thought they owed us. But why should that provoke bitterness? Again, because it makes us look bad in the eyes of others or it deprives us of something we think we deserve. Again, this is pride!

Strife – Strife flows out of a competitive desire to be number one, the desire to be acknowledged by others, the desire for power and authority and praise. And where might that come from? Pride!

Deceit – Why do we lie and mislead others and speak in fuzzy rather than forthright terms? Almost always it is because we hope to gain something for ourselves that we think we deserve, or we do it to hide something from others that we fear might make us look bad. Why? Pride!

Hypocrisy – Again, we are motivated to pretend to be something we *aren’t* because we fear being seen and known for what we really *are*. Why? Because of pride!

Slander – Why do we speak badly of others? Why do we slander them? Probably because we’ve been hurt ourselves, and we want revenge; or we want to gain acceptance with others and the only way is to diminish them in the minds of those people whose favor or respect we desperately long for. Again, all this is driven by pride!

Greed – Greed at its core is the desire to make more of and for ourselves than God wishes or permits. And pride is the poker that stokes the fires of materialism. The late Adrian Rogers, one of the greatest of Southern Baptist preachers, once said that the reason why we are going into debt is that our neighbors keep buying things *we can’t* afford! But why is the desire to keep up with the Jones’s so powerful? Pride! We can’t stand the thought of people thinking that we aren’t as rich and successful and talented and deserving and sophisticated as others are. Why? Pride!

I could go on endlessly, citing virtually every sin in the human soul, and at the bottom of each and every one lurks pride. Pride is quite simply ***that ugly part of your heart that causes you to be more concerned about yourself and your own reputation than you are about Christ and his.***

Pride is the reason . . .

- Pride is the reason why some men are afraid to be sensitive and gentle in relating to their wives.
- Pride is the reason why they won’t say “I’m sorry, please forgive me,” when they are in the wrong.
- Pride is the reason why some women shop endlessly lest they appear less fashionable than others.
- Pride is the reason some mothers push their children beyond what is healthy, hoping they will succeed and show themselves better and more successful than the children of their neighbors.
- Pride is the reason why men won’t seek counseling or help when their marriages are in ruins. They can’t bear the thought that others might think of them as inadequate to fix the problem themselves.
- Pride is the reason why some businessmen won’t carry their witness for Christ to the office.
- Pride is the reason why other men won’t serve in a visible capacity in the church.
- Pride is the reason why some refuse to submit to the authority of God’s Word.

- Pride is the reason why you respond angrily when your child's grades are lower than the grades of the kids of your chief competitor; pride is the reason you are ashamed of your kids because they don't keep up with the Jones's kids.
- Pride is often the reason why men in particular won't carry a Bible to church. That's right. It's not because they say to themselves: "I don't need to bring a Bible. Sam will project the verses on the screen." No, it's because in their pride they don't want others to think they are spiritually sensitive or that their Christianity is *too* important. For some, pride is what accounts for the desire to be seen in church; after all, that's what all good Americans do on Sunday; but they don't want others to get the idea that they are too interested in spiritual matters.
- ***Yes, and it is pride that explains why some of you are offended right now by the way I've just attributed some of your thoughts and actions to your pride!***

Perhaps the best summation is found in Proverbs 26:12 –

“Do you see a man who is wise in his own eyes? There is more hope for a fool than for him” (Prov. 26:12).

Why? Because ***pride puts a person beyond the perceived need for instruction***. “I don't need the wisdom of God's Word. I've already got it. I don't need the instruction and encouragement of others; I'm beyond that sort of thing. I don't need to be held accountable for my actions. Who are they to tell me what to do or not to do.” The proud heart is impervious to rebuke and insensitive to conviction. That's why he's more hopeless than the fool.

So how do we uproot pride from our hearts? How do we overcome its insidious influence in our lives? There are many answers, but none more helpful than the principle we find in **1 Corinthians 4:7**. There Paul asks this of the arrogant Corinthians:

“For who sees anything different in you? What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” (1 Cor. 4:7).

It is very difficult for the person who understands the sovereignty of God's grace to be prideful, unless of course he takes credit for understanding it! To know that all we have is a gift, that all we experience and enjoy is an expression of God's goodness and not ours, to know that everything in our possession, even and especially our salvation, is a gift is to take the first step in defeating and dethroning pride from our hearts. ***Pride is taking credit for what God has done. Pride is cosmic theft! God hates pride!***

Passion

We now turn our attention briefly to passion, or anger, or the destructive consequences of a quick temper.

It's important to know that in Proverbs it isn't anger per se that is in view but rather ***hasty anger***. Proverbs does not denounce righteous anger. Anger in and of itself is not necessarily a sin. Often it is a virtue, when, for example, our anger is aroused at the dishonoring of God's name. Proverbs, on the other hand, denounces a ***quick, premature, ill-considered, and passionate anger*** that does not pause long enough to reflect on the situation that has provoked the angry response. As Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 7:9 – “*Be not quick* in your spirit to become angry, for anger lodges in the heart of fools.”

I want to say four things about anger that are found in Proverbs.

First, the control of one's temper is an indication or marker of one's maturity.

“A man of quick temper acts foolishly, and a man of evil devices is hated” (Prov. 14:17).

“Whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly” (Prov. 14:29).

Here again we see that it isn't anger per se, but a hasty temper that is denounced. Sometimes anger is justified, but "whoever is *slow* to anger has great understanding." Slow down. Ponder. Think through what has happened. Consider the long-term consequences of your response. Choose your words carefully.

"A fool gives vent to his spirit, but a wise man quietly holds it back" (Prov. 29:11).

This doesn't mean that a wise man never gets mad or that he never expresses his opinion. It simply means that his response is *measured and thoughtful and constructive*.

By the way, I find it highly instructive that when the Apostle Paul listed the qualifications necessary to serve as an Elder in the local church, he mentioned two in particular:

"For an overseer [i.e., an elder], as God's steward, must be above reproach. He must not be **arrogant** or **quick-tempered** . . ." (Titus 1:7).

One would almost think Paul had been reading Proverbs!

Second, Proverbs points us to the value of self-restraint as well as the destructive effects of the loss of one's temper.

"Whoever is slow to anger is better than the mighty; and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city" (Prov. 16:32).

The point is that self-restraint is superior to any physical or military strength.

"A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot" (Prov. 14:30).

By a "tranquil heart" he means the person with an even-tempered spirit; the one who is calm and does not fly off the handle when he hears or sees something provocative. The blessing that comes with this is physical health!

"A hot-tempered man stirs up strife, but he who is slow to anger quiets contention" (Prov. 15:18).

This is similar to what Jesus said in the Beatitudes: "Blessed are the peace-makers, for they shall be called sons of God" (Mt. 5:9). Peace-makers are those who carry about with them an atmosphere in which quarrels die a natural death.

"A man of great wrath will pay the penalty, for if you deliver him, you will only have to do it again" (Prov. 19:19).

His point is that the hot-tempered person is a fool who will probably respond to your kindness with even more outbursts of uncontrolled anger. If he gets in trouble because of his temper, you shouldn't pay his fine because he is likely to do it all over again. Kindness will not have its effect on this sort of person. Once you begin to rescue him you'll spend your life bailing him out of jail!

"A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls" (Prov. 25:28).

The idea here is that he who has no control of himself is defenseless; he is as exposed and vulnerable to disaster as a city without walls.

Third, don't associate with a hot-tempered person.

"Make no friendship with a man given to anger, nor go with a wrathful man, lest you learn his ways and entangle yourself in a snare" (Prov. 22:24-25).

Does that even need explanation? Well, maybe just a little. The phrase “a man given to anger” literally means “owner of a nostril”! Surely the reason for drawing attention to the nose is that when one gets angry there is often a snort one hears or redness of skin that one sees. This is the sort of anger that is both vocal and visible.

Fourth, and finally, Proverbs has counsel on how to control one’s temper.

“Good sense makes one slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense” (Prov. 19:11).

By “good sense” he means ***discretion***: a careful analysis of what is right and what is wrong, together with why you feel angry and who it is that has provoked you. He’s praising ***the virtue of calm deliberation***. ***The most crucial moment is that time between the inward eruption of anger and its outward manifestation***. Stop! Think about why you are mad. It may be that fatigue has shortened your temper. It may be frustration at how you’ve been treated. It may be that you’ve actually misunderstood what someone meant or intended to do. And the virtue here in v. 11 is more than merely having a forgiving spirit. It also includes the willingness to shrug off insults, ***the absence of brooding hypersensitivity***, the ability to deny an enemy the pleasure of knowing that he has hurt you. In sum, it is the capacity to sleep on an insult!

Conclusion

How much better it would have been had that immature and foolish teenager found the strength from God’s grace to refrain from reacting with such anger and arrogance. How much better it would have been had he contemplated the ridiculous nature of his action and its destructive consequences. So, in conclusion, let us think and meditate deeply on the hateful nature of pride and uncontrolled passion. And the next time you are on a golf course, watch out for flying putters!