

Battling the Unbelief of Haughty Spirit

by John Piper

The sermon emphasizes the importance of battling unbelief and pride by recognizing and savoring the truth that everything is a gift from God, believing in the sovereignty of God, and casting anxieties on the Lord.

Duration: 30:46

Scripture: Proverbs 16:18, Jeremiah 9:23-24, Jeremiah 13:15, Matthew 6:33, 1 Corinthians 4:1-7, Hebrews 11:6, James 4:6

Topics: "Pride And Humility", "Faith And Obedience"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher focuses on the theme of pride and its opposite, which he identifies as faith. He begins by discussing the role of stewards of God's mysteries and emphasizes the importance of being trustworthy. The preacher then highlights the futility of human judgment and emphasizes that it is the Lord who ultimately judges. He goes on to explore various Bible verses, including 1 Corinthians 4:1-7 and James 4:13-16, to illustrate the presence of pride in different aspects of life such as intellect, physical abilities, and possessions. The preacher concludes by urging the audience to combat pride by embracing faith and submitting to God's word.

Transcript

Would you prepare to hear another word from God by taking your Bibles and turning to 1 Corinthians chapter 7, chapter 4, verses 1 through 7. 1 Corinthians 4, the first seven verses. This is how one should regard us as servants of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover, it is required of stewards that they be found trustworthy.

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged by you or by any human court. I do not even judge myself. I'm not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted.

It is the Lord who judges me. Therefore, do not pronounce judgment before the time. Before the Lord comes, we'll bring to light the things now hidden in darkness, and we'll disclose the purposes of the heart.

Then every man will receive his commendation from God. I've applied all this to myself and Apollos for your benefit, brethren, that you may learn by us not to go beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up in favor of one against another. For who sees anything different in you? What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if it were not a gift? Let's begin this message by a definition of unbelief, because we're talking in these messages about battling the unbelief of, today, a

haughty spirit or pride.

I would take my definition of unbelief from John 6.35 where it says, I am the bread of life. Jesus is talking now. I am the bread of life.

He who comes to me will never hunger, and he who believes in me will never thirst. And I would define unbelief like this on the basis of that verse. Unbelief is turning away from Jesus to look for satisfaction somewhere else.

Or to put it positively, belief in Jesus is turning to him or coming to him to feed on him, that is, to get my satisfaction and have my soul thirst satisfied from him. That means that eternal life, as we said earlier in John 3, is promised not to those who think things about Jesus as the Son of God merely, but to those who drink from the Son of God. Eternal life is promised to faith, and faith is not an idea in the head.

It's an appetite in the heart fastening on to the bread of life. You can think all kinds of ideas about that loaf of bread called Jesus Christ, and if you don't eat it to the satisfaction of your soul, you aren't saved. Faith is real engagement of the living water to the stilling of the thirst of our soul, a real eating of the bread.

And Jesus said, he who does not eat has not life within him. Thinking won't do. Only drinking will do.

So there's my definition of unbelief and belief. Now, what does that have to do with pride? Pride is a subcategory of unbelief. You can see it real clearly if I define it like this.

Unbelief is a turning away from the all-satisfying Christ to look for and find satisfaction in anything else. And pride is a turning away from that all-satisfying Christ in order to find satisfaction very specifically in self and being made much of by others. So you can see that pride is a species of unbelief.

Therefore, the battle against pride is the battle against unbelief as with all these other sins that we've seen. And the fight for humility is the fight of faith. Now, what I want to do, we don't have a lot of time left, is to begin with 1 Corinthians 4, 7. Look at this verse and then run real fast through five other verses elsewhere in the Bible.

And in each verse, look for pride and its opposite. And I think I can show you in every verse that we look at that this opposite thing to pride belongs to the nature of faith so that you will be really persuaded by the time we're done that if you want to attack pride, you must go for faith or you must attack unbelief. And I hope all along the way at every text, you will see practical instances of how to do it and that God will come into this room and through my word and by his spirit, create the appetite for him that I have called faith.

1 Corinthians 4, 7 says, who sees anything different in you? Or I think a better translation would probably be the NIV. Who makes you different from others or perhaps even better, who gives you your distinctives? The answer is God. What have you that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as though it were not a gift? Now, what's the opposite of boasting in that verse? The opposite of boasting in that verse is failure to recognize that everything you have is a gift from God.

Specifically, everything that distinguishes you positively from another person in which you are prone to boast is God's work and therefore, let him who boasts, boast in the Lord. So, the opposite of pride is recognizing and we've got to go beyond that word, don't we? Because people recognize in their head all kinds of things that have no... that make no difference in their heart. So, I'm going to go beyond the word recognizing and say, the opposite of pride is the recognizing and savoring or cherishing the truth that

everything I am and have is a gift from God in which I may not boast except to give him glory.

The way, therefore, to battle unbelief at this point or to battle pride at this point is to believe that. And remember, belief is an appetite and not just an idea. To believe that God has given me everything I have and every time I'm prone to boast in wisdom or strength or riches, I'm a fool.

The next text is in James chapter 4. Turn with me to James if you're going to use your Bible because we're going to look at two texts in James 4. The next two of the five are here in chapter 4, and the first one is in verses 6, 7, and 8. Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, in case you're flopping around there, it's a little book. James 4, verses 6, 7, and 8. God gives more grace, therefore, it says, God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. Submit yourselves, therefore, to God.

Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and he will draw near to you. Now, I see two opposites of pride in those verses, don't you? One, submitting yourself to God, and two, drawing near to God.

The opposite of pride is to submit. Pride wants to be independent, self-governing, autonomous, and it does not like recognizing that the creator can write the book and tell a creature how he must and ought to live. Pride doesn't like that creator write in God, and so it doesn't like to submit, go under God.

And therefore, whenever it gets wind, say in a church service or on the radio or in a book, that God is laying claim to their lifestyle, they'll take off and not come back to that church or listen to that station or read that book. And that's why it not only says submit, but draw near. If you won't submit to God, you can be sure God will be a threat to you, and you will hightail it as far from him as you can get and close your ears and shut your eyes and not have anything to do with this God who claims to have a right over you to tell you how to live.

And that's why the two things come together. Submit yourselves to God and draw near to God. So the way to fight pride in this verse is to believe that the one who made the world and my body and mind and all this society knows best how to live and therefore to submit to his word.

And in submitting to lay down all the arms of rebellion and watch him become a loving father and draw near to him again, like a little child, which is the opposite of pride and self-reliance. Third text is right here, further down the page, perhaps, verses 13 to 16 of James 4. Come now, you who say today or tomorrow we will go into such and such a town and spend a year there and trade and get gain, whereas you don't know about tomorrow. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes.

Instead, you ought to say, if the Lord wills, we will live. We shall do this or that. As it is, you boast in your arrogance and all such boasting is evil.

The way boasting expresses itself in this text is by unbelief in the sovereignty of God, in the details of your life. Unbelief in the sovereignty of God, in the details of your life, is the flip side of pride. You say, I'm going to Duluth for Christmas.

James comes back, how do you know you'll get to Duluth for Christmas? What's the big deal? I just said I'm going to Duluth. You see how intimate and practical the sovereignty of God is meant to be by James? We can't even say, I'm going to work tomorrow correctly, biblically, spiritually, unless there is at least the tacit belief, only by God will I get to work tomorrow. And if I don't get to work, God didn't let me get to work.

Do you believe that the sovereignty of God has to do with whether you get home from church today? Has to do with your business and whether it prospers or not? Has to do with your health and whether you get sick and die or not? Did you see the implication there for health? If the Lord wills, we shall live. Why didn't Ed Stowe die from that ruptured artery in surgery on Thursday? Answer, God. That's why.

God. Why did Jerry Westman die? God. When the time appointed comes, we will die.

Before the time comes, we are immortal. God reigns over the molecules in your body, over the passing of cars on the freeway, over floods and earthquakes. And pride hates that fact and rebels against it violently sometimes.

No, we will not have a God over this universe with that much control. Pride says, and James says very plainly, this is one of the clearest texts on the sovereignty of God in all the Bible. All such boasting that presumes to think you'll get to Duluth is evil.

And therefore, the way to fight pride in this text is to believe in the sovereignty of God, to cherish it, to delight in it, to rest in it. The next text is 1 Peter 5. 1 Peter is the next book over, I think. Just keep turning to the right.

1 Peter 5. We'll look at verses 5 to 7. It says, likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another. For God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.

Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God, that in due time, he may exalt you. Cast all your anxieties on him, for he cares about you. Now, notice something very beautiful here.

Peter says humility should be like a big garment, maybe a big afghan you get for Christmas. Wrap it all around you so that your dealings with others are in terms of humility. Clothe yourselves with humility, he says.

And then, beautifully, one of the things that humility will do is cast its anxieties on the Lord. Now, here's my question. Why is casting anxieties on the Lord the opposite of pride? Which I think it clearly is from this text.

It's an expression of humility. Why is casting of your anxieties on the Lord the opposite of pride? I asked that at the breakfast table this morning, and the first answer that came back was, because proud people don't think they need any help from God. And I said, right.

And there's another right answer. Pride people generally don't think they have anxieties. Or, let's be more careful, they're not ready to admit them.

All kinds of means are found of concealing their anxieties. So, there's two reasons why casting your anxieties upon God puts you in a category different from proud people. One, proud people don't want to admit they've got anxieties.

They want to look so together. We dress like we're together. We walk like we're together.

We do our business like we're together. Anything to cut the cool image. And so, it's just not part of the agenda for proud people to say, I've got an anxiety about this problem at work, or my relationship at home, or my health, or whatever.

It's not what they do. And the second thing is, even if they do admit it, proud people don't want to, like a baby, say, God, help me. I can't handle this by myself.

I need God. And so, can you see what the opposite of pride is here? It's such a beautiful invitation. You know, God hates pride.

But the reason He hates pride is because He loves people. People who are not proud find more grace, James said. They draw near to God, and He bears their anxieties and works omnipotently for them.

And God loves to work on behalf of those who wait for Him in humility like a child. You know, there's a practical implication here for us that I want to stress before we move on to the next text. It has to do with prayer.

We need, in this church, in our prayer meetings, say 20-20 meetings, or your prayers at home with your family, or a prayer meeting on Wednesday night, or prayers in this pulpit, we need to give verbal expression to this dimension of faith, namely, to express our desperate need for God and our longing for His fullness. I know that there are a lot of people who say, well, I pray that way in private, but not in public. And I thank God if you pray that way in private.

But I plead with you not to conceal the root and essence of faith when we are praying together. Oh, the ministry to me when I hear a saint in a staff meeting or at prayer meetings say, Oh, God, I need you. Oh, God, help me.

I'm so frightened. I'm so worried. Please help me.

I need you. And there are a lot of you who have actually convinced yourself that to pray for others in public is loving, and to pray for yourself like that in public is selfish. And you know what? You're deceiving yourself.

The very opposite is the case. It is pride that will not before a brother and sister say, God, I need you. And listen, I need to hear you say that.

I need it. And if I need it, we all need it. Very few things strengthen my hand in the work and build my faith as when I used to hear Shaw or one of the others in staff meeting with face in hand say, Oh, God, help me in my work.

It's pride and it's deadly to a church. We just put up these ugly, all sufficient facades to think that when we come to God in prayer, we can take care of his problem and her problem and that sickness and that spiritual problem and never cry out to God. Oh, God, come.

Do you know that if David had acted like that, we wouldn't have the book of Psalms. Some of you, oh, we need to hear each other do that. We need to hear each other say, God, I need you because we need to hear faith, the essence of humility and faith.

The fifth text briefly is back in Jeremiah. If you're, if you want to keep following Jeremiah 13 and it says, and it's so short, I'll have it read by the time you get there, probably here and give ear, be not proud. This is 1315 here and give ear, be not proud for the Lord.

God has spoken, give glory to the Lord, your God, before he brings darkness. Now that text is very simple to divide into the pride and its opposite. It says, be not proud.

And then it says, give glory to God. The opposite of pride is giving glory to God. But how do you do that? What does that mean? We all know here, don't we, that you don't give God glory by adding some of your glory to his glory and therefore increasing his glory.

That's blasphemy. You give glory to God by doing things that make him look glorious. Specifically, Romans 420, Paul said, Abraham grew strong in his faith, giving glory to God.

Faith glorifies God as trustworthy. Faith glorifies God as wise. Faith glorifies God as strong and gracious.

And so the way to give God glory is to do things from faith and to avoid all the works of unbelief that we've been talking about. Because when you act out of faith, it appears that God is underneath sustaining you like a rock. If you only do those things in life that require no faith upon the work of God, how could anybody ever see God in you? Risk-taking is of the essence of a life of witness.

The last text just puts an exclamation point behind that one. It's just three chapters earlier in Jeremiah, chapter 9, verses 23 to 24. Thus says the Lord, let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, let not the rich man glory in his riches, but let him who glories glory in this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who practiced steadfast love, justice and righteousness in the earth, for in these things I delight, says the Lord.

I come away from that verse reeling at how we're being attacked on every side with this enemy of pride. The mind, the body, the possessions. You see those? How prone we are to want to be made much of for our minds.

I got good grades. I said a clever word tonight and people laughed real hard when I spoke. I won at Scrabble.

It can't be that simple where it shows its ugly head. Or our body, maybe you sit there and say, well, not my problem, I'm not smart. I don't ever have anything to boast about when it comes to my brain.

And watch out because the next category is the category of our bodies. We love to be made much of because we can work long and hard or because we're muscular or shapely or because we can run fast or lift a heavy weight or drive a ball a long way. Or the third category is your possessions.

Oh, how we love to be thought cool because the car we're driving or the stereo we've got or the neighborhood we live in, the house we have, it is insidious. It comes from every angle. We love to be made much of until grace ends it all.

So we need to end. Now, how shall we sum it up? Let me ask this question in closing. What is the root tactic in putting the axe to pride? What is the most deep and fundamental thing that needs to be done in order to target with a lethal gun this unbelief of pride? I wrote in my journal on December 6th of this year, this entry, and I'm going to read this as we close, something that is a personal confession and a personal answer to that question.

It is not, is not the most effective way of bridling my delight in being made much of to focus on making much of God. Self-denial and crucifixion of the flesh are essential, but oh, how easy it is to be made much of even for my self-denial. How shall this insidious motive of pleasure in being made much of be broken except through bending all my faculties to delight in the pleasure of making much of God? And Christian hedonism is the final solution.

It is deeper than death to self. You have to go down deeper into the grave of the flesh to find the truly freeing stream of miracle water that ravishes you with the taste of God's glory. Only in that speechless, all-satisfying admiration is the end of self.

Let's stand for prayer. Father, I'm sure I'm speaking for hundreds now as I cry out to you concerning the remnants of corruption in my own heart and the desperation I feel sometimes wondering whether I write advent poems to be made much of, whether I preach to be made much of, whether I love my wife to be made much of. The insidiousness of this pride is so deep and wicked.

And I just pray, oh God, that I would and we would have eyes to see that all is a gift from you, that drawing near to you and submitting to you is the way of joy and wisdom, that you are sovereign over the details of our lives, and that you do invite us childlike to put our anxieties on you. And it is utter folly to be anything but a baby in your arms. Oh God, come with your sword and sever the root of pride by enlarging the appetite of our faith in you.

Through Jesus Christ I pray and all the people said amen.

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