

West Side Fellowship

Pride in Ministry

*Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.
Number 12v3*

Over the last few weeks we have seen how pride infects and destroys our spiritual lives in various areas and this week we will look at how it creeps into ministry. Now as we have seen before, pride is a very difficult thing to see in ourselves, for pride itself blinds us. For many the idea of pride in their ministry is instantly rejected, why? Because of pride! Our response is that we are serving the Lord, how can that be prideful?

So before we get on our spiritual high horse and deny the truth, let's be reminded of Moses, the most humble man on the face of the earth.

*But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not trust in me enough to honour me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you will not bring this community into the land I give them."
Numbers 20v12*

Moses despite his godly humility was not above raising himself up in pride, for as we read in *Numbers 20v1-11* Moses was having a bad day in ministry, the people had been moaning again, panicking over a subject that the Lord had delivered them from before and Moses suddenly loses perspective and raises himself up above the people and cries out "Must we bring you water out of this rock?"

At first we can easily miss the truth of what is happening here, for God had told him to bring water from the rock, but He had also given clear instruction as to how the water was to be brought forth, not as in *Exodus 17v5-7*, this time he was just to speak to the rock. But more importantly, it was the Lord who was bringing forth the water, not Moses. Moses has raised himself up to the position of God before the Israelites, allowing himself to become their provider rather than the Lord.

It is a trap that we all very easily fall into, and it comes from a misunderstanding of what ministry is, for too often we think of ministry as ministering unto others, when in fact our job is to minister unto the Lord; He is the one who we are serving if we claim to be his servants. Our ministry to others is the overflow of our ministry to the Lord and is done only in obedience to the Lord in the way he desires the ministry to be done. If we jump ahead of the Lord and just launch out on our own we are actually ministering in pride, assuming we know what the Lord wants done in someone else's life. We are claiming that we do not need to know the Lord's command and have no need of knowing his plans in respect of the person or persons we are ministering to. At this point we have assumed spiritual superiority and are ministering in the flesh and may well finish up working against the plans of the Lord.

Jesus answered, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the father except through me.

John 14v6

Let us humble ourselves and remember the whole point of Christ dying on the cross; it was to allow us, sinful man, to be able to come to the Father through the forgiveness and mercy found in the blood of Jesus. Notice that Jesus death was not just about the forgiveness of sins, the forgiveness of sin was a ministry that allows the individual to come to the Father, to bring fallen man back into a true relationship with the Father. Too often we look at the goal as the forgiveness of sin and treat ministry in the same way, often looking for how many "we" can save. True salvation is much more than the forgiveness of sins, eternal salvation is about coming to the Father through that forgiveness of sins (*John 17v3*). Anything less and we have given people a substandard gospel, it would be like buying a car that has no wheels, all that power, yet it has failed to fulfil it's job to take us to our destination, knowing God!

To understand the dangers of pride in ministry, we need to think back to the fall of man. For as we have read before, one of the great temptations to Adam and Eve was that they would be like God (*Genesis 3v5*), the one who is to be looked to, sought after and revered. It is at the very root of pride and was the desire of Satan himself and as we read in *Matthew 4v9*, it has always been his desire to have people bow down and submit to his authority, to give themselves in a way pleasing to him, the very basis of worship (*Romans 12v1*). This pride of the flesh, to be seen and honoured is in total opposition to the life of humility that Christ displayed (*Philippians 2v6-8*), for he was totally submitted to the will of the Father. That was the desire and drive that powered his life (*John 4v34*). The great danger we face from pride is that our ministry is not powered by doing the Fathers will, rather our drive is from being seen and revered by others.

And do not go up to my alter on steps, lest your nakedness be exposed on it.

Exodus 20v26

Frontline ministries, those ministries that entail speaking, singing or praying before people are fertile fields for pride to grow in. For in these ministries it is very easy to start to be praised and lifted up by others and for us to think of ourselves more highly than we ought (*Romans 12v3*). It is why in all these ministries it is crucial to understand that we minister unto the Lord. For the preacher that means that the message must be the message that the Lord has given, it matters very little what the congregation think or want, for the ministry is unto the Lord. If our concerns become about how we are perceived before men, how our preaching and teaching is ranked, then pride has already drifted into our lives and the spiritual fruit will be spoilt and unfit for consumption. The same with worship, for as we see in this modern age, it is frightening how worship groups and singers are becoming idolised with people going to a church because of the music. That is not Godly obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit, rather it is a seeking after the desires of the flesh and using a spiritual veneer to cover over the truth. God does not need coloured lights, multi media and smoke machines, for He looks to the heart of men and if their heart is set on being entertained, rather than offering sacrifice, their worship, no matter how great it may sound, will be rejected. A church's goal is always to lead people to the Father and that is a spiritual relationship, to encourage each other to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, helping and encouraging each other in the Lord so that we may finish walking on the path the Lord has set before us (*Philippians 3v7-15*). If we concentrate on puffing up the flesh, of endlessly trying to make people feel good about themselves we will see gain in the short term, but in the long term eternal loss.

Again as we think of ministry, what is our goal? To have people following us or following Christ? It is amazing how many Christians will spend hours listening to their favourite preacher or worship group, yet spend little or no time seeking the Lord; the preacher or worship minister has become their route to God, moving Christ aside, having a form of godliness without God. A knowledge about God, but not a relationship with God, something we are warned of in *Matthew 7v21-23*. All this comes from allowing ourselves to be elevated in pride. In all our ministry, in all our teaching, it is Christ and him crucified that needs to be lifted up, he is the message and example we are to preach and follow (*1 Corinthians 1v23*). It may be a message that is unpopular, it may be a message that leads to rejection by man and a smaller congregation, but it is the way of the Spirit and the power of God (*1 Corinthians 1v18*).

Follow my example as I follow the example of Christ.
1 Corinthians 11v1

One of the dangers of pride that we easily slip into is the desire to be seen as part of something big and important, wanting to be seen as part of something special easily becomes more important than how we are seen by the Lord. We start to aspire to being like another minister, desiring to have or be part of their ministry, their following, preaching, confidence or musical ability etc. Much as it is a good thing to desire the Christ like attributes of Godly men and women, the danger comes that we try to hang onto their coat tails, and pride slips in as we associate ourselves with their ministry. Very quickly our association with that person and the assumed reputation that comes with it blinds us to the fact that it is now pride and self esteem that is driving us rather than our desire to serve the Lord. It's nothing new as we see in *1 Corinthians 1v12* and it shows just how quickly our association with a minister, ministry, a project or even certain doctrines can quickly lead us to serving and listening to them rather than seeking and serving the Lord. The person we aspire to always needs to be Christ, he is the one we are told to fix our eyes and thoughts on (*Hebrews 3v1 & 12v2*). Let us make sure that our offer of discipleship and service is to him and not changed to the worship and service of man. As Paul says, we are to be servants of Christ who are called to whatever the Lord calls us to, but it starts with the humble servant heart (*Romans 1v1*). As pastors we need to watch and pray about this trait of pride, not only in ourselves, but in those who we minister to, for it is too easy for us to try and push people forwards before humility and servant hood has truly taken root in their spiritual life. Often we will try to push someone to the front because of their natural ability to speak or sing, or even to manage things. Yet if we have not waited on the Lord and sought His direction and timing we are not blessing these people, rather we are putting them in a position of extreme danger as we read in *1 Timothy 3v6*, for if the soil has not been cleansed of pride, the fruit that grows will be tainted.

The final area we will look at in regards to pride in ministry is our ability to try and replace the Lord in individuals lives. For if we think back to Satan and his fall, his desire was to be looked up to, to be relied on and worshipped (that is what worshipping idols is all about). The desire to be looked up to and to be seen as the provider for the needs of others. It's interesting to hear Christians talk about those that rely on them, their church, their house group, about the ministry that needs them. This is actually the root of pride, for it assumes that the other person or ministry cannot move forwards without us, as if we are now God. If that is the case we have totally failed in our ministry, for the goal of all ministry is to lead others to the Father through Christ and allow Him to be their provider, their comfort, their strength and their guide; when we try to take control of these things we are not a blessing, we are a curse.

As an example, many years ago I worked with a man who did not speak until he was about three years old. Obviously his parents had great concerns, but he explained to me why he didn't speak; he had no need to! He would just cry out, or point to whatever he wanted and his brothers and sisters would run round after him doing whatever he wanted because he was the baby of the family. In their concern to fix all his discomforts in life they removed his need to speak and also his need to learn to do things for himself. He was comfortable because all his fleshly needs had been met by those around him, but it was not a blessing to him.

When we start to raise ourselves up in pride, especially in caring for others, the danger is that we remove the individuals need to seek and communicate with the Lord for themselves. Just like a toddler, there comes a point when you have to hand them the spoon and let them feed themselves and as any parent knows, it will be slow and messy. It would be far quicker to feed them, but they would never learn to feed themselves. In our pride we need to be very careful that we do not try to take on the role of the Holy Spirit in their lives, becoming the one who will seek the Lord for them, becoming their physical and emotional provider. That does not mean that the problem the person has is not real, that they do not have needs, but are we the one who should meet those needs? Very often we have to be able to humble ourselves and allow the Lord to work through others to make sure their dependency grows in the Lord rather than in us.

We read in *1 Chronicles 17v1-14* how king David wanted to build a temple for the Lord and even Nathan the prophet starts to go along with him for it sounds a great and worthy idea (*1 Chronicles 17v2*). At this point David sees himself as the man for the job, he has the power, the authority, the resources and experience to carry out the work and his mind has been made up. The Lord had to speak to Nathan to humble David and tell him not to build the temple, that this was a ministry for someone else to carry out. Interestingly the one that this ministry was given to had no experience or wisdom and would have to seek the Lord for it. If David had carried out the work, Solomon would not have grown in the Lord and become the man he did.

Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world.

1 John 4v1

As we have seen, pride can so easily infect our ministry, removing it of the power of God. It is so easy for us to launch out in assumption and pride without seeking the Lord; to be sucked in by the big and spectacular or the desire to have the needs of the flesh met and our self esteem pumped up. When we talk about evil spirits we instantly think of some terrible physical form of sin and corruption, yet what we fail to recognise is the soil that all that uncleanness grows in is pride, the original sin of Satan himself.

Humbling ourselves before the Lord and allowing the Holy Spirit to reveal the truth about our hearts, to show us the fruit of pride that taints our spiritual life and ministry will be a painful process, but if our desire is to humbly serve the Lord it is the only way forward and if we will allow the Lord to humble us it will bring glory to His name.

Search me, O God and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts.

See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.

Psalms 139v23-24