

Pride

DAVE BAST

According to both the Bible and universal Christian tradition, pride is the first sin, the chief sin, and the root of most other sins. Ironically though, many people today think of it more as a virtue than as a sin. “Shouldn’t I take pride in myself?” People ask. “Don’t I need a healthy self-esteem?” Let us dig deeper into the nature of this sin of pride; what it is, what it is not, and most importantly, how to combat it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast; and today, Scott, we are starting a new series of programs together on the seven deadly sins; this traditional list of the most serious sins according to the Christian faith.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The seven deadly sins – some people are not familiar with this list. It is a very old list. It developed over time. Parts of it came out of the monastic tradition, I think. There were various versions circulated for a while, but the seven sins that we are going to be looking at in this series, and those are, by the way, just real quickly to get us going here: Pride, envy, anger, sloth, greed, gluttony, and lust. That is pretty much the accepted version these days of the so-called seven deadly sins.

DAVE BAST

Right. Yes; there are several interesting things about that list, if you just listen to it or think about it. One is that each one of these things is more an attitude than an action.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

I think that is the reason why Christians, for many centuries now, have focused on these; because these are the attitudes, the underlying sort of frame of mind or spiritual disposition that gives rise to all the actions that are hurtful and bad and cause so much destruction.

SCOTT HOEZEE

These seven sins are almost like the disposition that you carry around with you in life. It is the lens through which you view everything else; and, as we will talk about in just a little while, that is why these attitudes of the seven deadly sins do give rise to, and they are at the root of, actions that end up being destructive of shalom and vandalistic of God’s desires for His creation. They stem from these attitudes.

DAVE BAST

Right; and that also means that these are the hardest kinds of things to root out of ourselves.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes.

DAVE BAST

It is one thing to kind of control your actions, but to get deeper than that; you think, for example, of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, and He is always pointing back behind the action to the attitude, and many of those are these seven deadly sins – many of things that He talks about – so, we are really talking to ourselves here. We are not trying to go out there and point fingers at people in the world and say how bad you are, but, as you pointed out earlier, Scott, this is a very healthy thing to do as we focus on the cross and our own need for more Christ-likeness in our lives, to try to examine ourselves, our own hearts, and see what we can do about the problems that we find there.

So, let us talk about pride. Turn to that, the chief sin, the first sin I said at the top of the program. I also pointed out that for a lot of people this is a virtue, so what is the deal?

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right. Well, most people are aware that pride is a sin; such that they are really nervous of having any of it in their lives, but there is a healthy pride and then there is what we are going to mostly talk about, the sinful pride. I mean, I know some people who, if they say, "Oh, my grandchild just graduated with honors from college, I am so proud of him," in the good sense, they always want to say... well, of course you take pride in your children or your grandchildren, and that is a good sense. You are proud of them and that is not sinful because that is putting all of your affection on somebody else. The problem with pride as a sin is it is all about you.

DAVE BAST

Yes; but even there, there is a difference between sinful pride and healthy self-respect.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

We do need to have self-respect, because that is what keeps us going, and we sometimes look at a person or say of a person, "Come on, pick yourself up. Shape up. Don't you have any respect for yourself?" Because they kind of let themselves go.

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Bible tells us we were created in the image of God. We are creatures endowed with a lot of dignity; so, we should not feel bad about ourselves in a negative sense, but pride is different. We should look at what that difference is.

DAVE BAST

Let's do that by looking at the primal story of sin in the Bible; the story of the original sin, the first sin, which was really rooted and grounded in pride. It is told in Genesis 3 – probably most of the people listening to this program are familiar with this – the story of the Garden, Adam and Eve, and the serpent coming to tempt the woman. Well, I will just read the key verse:

²So the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, ³but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.'"
⁴"You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman, ⁵"for God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

That was the key... the temptation...

SCOTT HOEZEE

That was the kicker; that did it. And of course, the tragedy is that God had given Adam and Eve, and the human race through them, so much already. We already were so much like God; we had been made in God's

image, and yet, that desire to sort of be on a par, even with God, that is exactly the temptation of pride; to be the center of your own universe, to be the one to whom everybody else pays attention; you are in the limelight, you like the limelight, you do not want to share the limelight, and there you go; now everything is revolving around you.

DAVE BAST

Yes. I remember years ago hearing a line, kind of a clever line, I thought, “He is a self-made man who worships his creator.” So, this kind of pride... really, a synonym for it is selfishness, and that is the thing that we recognize in other people. We do not always recognize it in ourselves, sadly, but we can see it in people who are arrogant or vain or conceited or self-absorbed or always thinking about, “Me and mine and I come first.” That is the root sin of pride.

SCOTT HOEZEE

There can also be a healthy sense of being happy about the things that God helps you to achieve in life. You can be proud of your achievements in the sense of giving thanks to God for them, but of course, the truly proud would rather be envied than admired. They do not want other people to say, “Hey, you do a good job.” They want other people to think, “Man, I wish I were that person because he is just so great and I am just so little and so slovenly...” So, the truly proud want other people to feel bad about themselves on account of how great you (the truly proud) are.

DAVE BAST

Well, I said earlier that it is the root sin, too, because so much of the rest flows from this. In fact, even the attitudes of the other seven deadly sins, most of them can be traced back to being triggered by pride; anger, for example. What is anger? Anger is the rage reaction that we feel when our will has been thwarted somehow; or what we desire has been stopped or denied us; and it is really our pride.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I did not get what I wanted and I should get what I want because I am that worthy of a person.

DAVE BAST

And you can go through all the others and point to the same thing, so this is a huge problem for human life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And again, it is an attitude. We said all of these sins are an attitude, a disposition, which is why often with pride it is images of height that are associated with it. “She’s on her high horse.” “He’s always looking down his nose at other people.” “He has such a lofty opinion of himself.” All of these images of height, where you see yourself as inflated over everybody else, they all look up to you and you look down on them, and that is the root attitude of what pride is all about.

DAVE BAST

And, it is destructive of genuine community because you cannot really have healthy relationships with other people if you think of yourself as being on a higher plane somehow and all of these others are down there, not your equal. So really, it is a problem, and the question is: What can be done about it? The Bible has quite a bit to say, not only about diagnosing the problem of pride or selfishness, self-worship, but how to overcome it; and we are going to look at that in just a moment.

BREAK:

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

Along with Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

In this series on the seven deadly sins, we are looking at the sin of pride today, and Dave, we were saying in the first segment that pride is the sin that makes you think everything revolves around you; you are a lofty person; you look down at all other people; if you are not the center of attention then you are not happy. There are some examples from history of this. I was thinking of this when I was reading a recently released biography of Lyndon Baines Johnson, President Johnson, from the 1960s. Apparently, at dinner parties, as long as the topic of conversation revolved around him, he was lively and animated and talking, but if somebody changed the subject, he would pretend to go to sleep, and he would not wake up again until the topic came back to him; and that is often the way it goes, that everything has to work for you so you will be the center of attention at all times.

DAVE BAST

Yes, they say of General Douglas MacArthur, the five-star general who commanded in the eastern theater in World War II, that he insisted on everyone calling him General, including his wife.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Including his wife, yes; and he always wanted to intimidate people, so if you walk into his office – he was kind of like the Governor of Japan for a long time after World War II – he put his desk up on a pedestal and he put a huge mirror behind his desk so that people who would come in would literally be looking up at him and his image in the mirror would be even bigger. That is it; you want other people to revere you.

DAVE BAST

So the question is, if we recognize this and we want to turn from it, we want to get at the pride in our own hearts, that part of us that is curved inward, which incidentally is how St. Augustine defined this original sin of pride: It is man curved in on himself, looking inward rather than upward toward God in worship and adoration. What do we do about it?

SCOTT HOEZEE

The Bible is consistent on this, that the antidote to pride is its opposite, which is humility. Listen to the words of the Apostle Peter from I Peter 5:4-5*, where Peter writes to his readers:

^{5b}All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another because God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. ⁶Humble yourselves, therefore, under God's mighty hand, that He may lift you up in due time.

DAVE BAST

That is really striking, that verse, and the first thing that strikes me about it is how much God hates this sin of pride. God opposes the proud, Peter says, and that runs throughout the Bible. He is quoting, or alluding to verses in the Old Testament; or you think of the great song of Mary.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; Mary was a student of what we now call the Old Testament – the Hebrew scriptures. She said in her song, “God is going to scatter the proud. He is going to send them away empty,” and she was indeed quoting Isaiah. There are passages in Isaiah where Isaiah says, “You proud people, you are high and lifted up in your own minds, and God is going to knock you down and bring you low.”

DAVE BAST

I wonder if you have ever thought about that. It is terrible to imagine a person opposing God.

**Correction:* The audio of this program misstates the reference for this passage as I Peter 5:4-5. The correct reference is I Peter 5:5b-6.

For example, Saul of Tarsus before he became the Apostle Paul; Jesus appeared to him in that great vision and said, “Saul, you are like an animal that is kicking against the goad. You are only hurting yourself.” But, how much more terrible to think of God opposing us; and in fact, He does, and maybe somebody says, “What do you mean? I thought God was kind and loving and gracious, and He just waits for us to turn to Him.” And the answer is: No, that is only a partial picture of who God really is, and there are things that He hates and that He is determined not to put up with, and the chief among those is the person who is proud.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that loops back to something we said earlier in this program, Dave, which is, the proud are always looking down. We said that of those images of height; he is always looking down his nose. If you spend your whole life looking down at others, that probably means you never look up to God; so, you have cut yourself off from God. God has to oppose the proud. He has got to bring them low or they have no chance of even seeing God Himself, and humility is the way we do it. So, Peter makes it clear that you have to put on humility like a garment; clothe yourselves with humility. Put it on every day like a sweater that you wear so that when you interact with other people you see them at eye level; you see life for what it truly is, which is a situation where God has given gifts to all kinds of people – you, too – but, not just you. So, you look at everybody at eye level and say, “You’re no better than I am. I am certainly not better than you. We are all in this together. Thanks be to God. Let’s build the Kingdom. Let’s work together and be grateful for what we’ve got.”

Dave Bast;

That connects with another thing we said earlier. Pride destroys the possibility of community, but if we are willing to humble ourselves, to lower ourselves, so that we are all on the same level, then community, the bonds of friendship and fellowship and love, can begin to flourish. Peter gives it as a command, “Humble yourself under the hand of God.” Now, God will humble you if you do not do that because He is not going to put up with it forever, but do you really want that to happen? Do you want to be humbled in some terrible way when God forcibly reminds you that you are not your own creator? Rather, we are given the invitation to voluntarily lower ourselves, and that is part of the thing, too – this height imagery again; the proud are always high and mighty and the humble will get low and see who they truly are and begin to relate to one another and to God as they should.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and sometimes we misunderstand even what that means; and so, we will talk in just a moment about what it means to be humble.

BREAK:

DAVE BAST

Hello again. This is Groundwork. I am Dave Bast, along with Scott Hoezee. We have gotten to the point in this program on pride, the first of the seven deadly sins, where we want to talk in specifics about the virtue of humility – prides opposite – and the way we can go about doing that. I think maybe, as with pride, we tried to clear away some of the misconceptions about what it means to be proud. It is not having a healthy self-image or taking pride in your proper accomplishments or your family or that. It is this self-centered, self-over-weaning selfishness; but humility has some misconceptions related to it as well, and maybe we need to clear away those.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I think sometimes people think humility is the same thing as humiliation, or that being a humble person means you become the world’s doormat; everybody wipes their feet on you and you are just so humble and you never, ever want anybody to notice you. Well, that can go too far, where you are almost self-abasing, where you are not even taking credit for the good things God is doing through you; that is being humiliated.

DAVE BAST

Some people wear humility as a badge of pride, almost. I think of this great character in Dickens’ *David Copperfield*, Uriah Heep, and he is always wringing his hands and saying, “Oh, I am your ‘umble, ‘umble

servant.” You know, it is just phony as all get out. So, it does not mean somehow convincing yourself that you are lousy; it does not mean trying to pretend that you have no ability, or anything along those lines; but rather, I think the Bible points to humility as a very specific action that starts with developing a proper self-awareness or self-concept.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is just basically saying: Look, you have gifts, other people have gifts; recognize that you are on a level playing field here. God, in the Church in particular, where the context to which Peter and Paul and the other New Testament writers wrote about humility and being Christ-like, God has given you a level playing field. You do not possess every gift the Church needs, but other people make up where you lack and you maybe make up where others lack, and together you get it done. So, it is just levelheadedness, it is accuracy, it is honesty, it is being clear-eyed about what is what in life. That is the basic part of what humility is; it is just being accurate about who is who and what is what.

DAVE BAST

You know that verse, the famous verse where Jesus says, summarizing the law, “Love the Lord your God,” first and foremost, “and love your neighbor as yourself,” the second part. A lot of times it seems like, lately in particular, you will hear people say, “Well, that means you have to love yourself.” I have always thought: Ahhh, I do not think He is trying to teach self-love primarily. I think what He is trying to say there is, we need to put others at least on the same level as we put ourselves. Kind of what you were saying: Be accurate, we are all in this together; and to me, the virtue of humility is that you do not really think about yourself. You try to forget yourself because you are focusing on your neighbor and their needs.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is why there are some very talented, very successful people – you have met some of them, I have, too – some very talented and successful people who do really amazing work, and yet they are really humble, because when you are around them, they are always focused on other people; although they will take your compliment. They will not say, “Oh, no, no, no, I’m worthless.”

DAVE BAST

Right, “I’m a worm; I’m a worm.”

SCOTT HOEZEE

No, they do not say that. They recognize that they contribute meaningful things, but they do not talk about that. They are always saying, “What a great job you did.” They are noticing waitresses in restaurants, and they are noticing baggers at the grocery store, and they are noticing the so-called invisible people who do all the behind-the-scenes work at church. I have met some very wealthy, but also very successful, very talented people who are completely humble because they are just focused on other people. And, if other people are focused on them, well, they will get their compliments along the way. They will support each other. That is that level playing field. We are in this to serve each other.

DAVE BAST

You know how you recognize – this is really pretty simple – this just struck me as you were talking – you know how you recognize a humble person? It is not what they are saying or they are touting their... They are nice.

SCOTT HOEZEE

They are nice, yes.

DAVE BAST

If you meet a really nice person, I guarantee you, that is a humble person. No matter how famous or how great, and we all the examples and counter-examples there.

SCOTT HOEZEE

I was thinking of that recently when I was reading a commentary by Frederick Dale Bruner, who has written great commentaries on Matthew, and now a new one on John. In his Matthew commentary, in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus at one point says the Golden Rule, in Matthew 7: Do onto others as you would have them to do onto you. This sums up the Law and the Prophets. Dale Bruner said, “What Jesus is basically saying is, ‘Be nice to each other because that is what the Bible is about.’” And indeed, niceness – generosity also; the humble are generous because they are always looking to lift up other people and the gifts God has given them.

DAVE BAST

They are approachable. They do not make you feel like a jerk or a worm if you are with them.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And they are servants, right? That is the other part of humility that is in the Bible, in the New Testament; what Jesus was in Philippians; I mean, Paul says, “Look, Jesus was the servant of all.” He was God; very God of very God, as the Creed says, and yet He became everybody’s servant; He washed their feet in the upper room to set an example; the humble are always there to serve. They never say, “Oh, I see that they need volunteers for such and such. Well, I am above that. I will leave that to the little people.” No, they are the first to volunteer to serve in the soup kitchen, to serve in the homeless program, because that is what we are here to do.

DAVE BAST

There is a classic to-do thing: If you want to humble yourself, if you want to combat your pride, if you want to become the kind of person that Jesus was and is, there is a very simple thing to do: Go out and find someone to serve. That is all you have to do. All you have to do is look at your neighbor, whoever they are, wherever they are, and see what need there is and then say, “I’ll do it. Let me help. Let me do something about this,” and that is how you become humbled and that is how you fight against pride and that is how you turn out to be what you are supposed to be.

SCOTT HOEZEE

That is what Peter meant. Clothe yourself with humility, and going out and doing that is exactly that. Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/pride>

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