

The Problem of Pride

The book of Proverbs, like all the other portions of God's Word, has nothing but utter condemnation for pride. Though it is a common sin, Proverbs nowhere suggests that there is any call or justification for it.

Pride is an attitude. God is not opposed to a person being a man of knowledge (how else could one be a teacher or a doctor or many other useful persons?), but He is opposed to that person being puffed up about it. God is not opposed to a person operating a successful business and making good money from it (especially if he uses the money properly), but He is opposed to him getting the big head over it and getting to trusting in his possessions instead of in God. God is not against people having a good home, but He is against them having a feeling of superiority as a result, thinking themselves to be too nice to associate with others. Yes, pride is an attitude. Let us look at

I. GOD'S ATTITUDE TOWARD PRIDE.

16:5 says, "Every one that is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord." 6:17 speaks similarly when it lists pride with other things that are abominations to Him. In this latter passage, it speaks of a "proud look". When people are proud in their hearts, you can see it in their countenances. Some of them take on an over-bearing appearance. Some will take on a smirking appearance. Some have an appearance of self-righteousness. You can tell by looking at some that they think they are better than others.

God's attitude is fully brought out in 15:25, when it says, "The Lord will destroy the house of the proud." So, a person had better be careful about contracting or keeping an attitude so contrary to the

wishes of God.

II. PRIDE IS LISTED AS A TROUBLE-MAKER.

"He that is of a proud heart stirreth up strife" (28:25), and 13:10 says, "Only by pride cometh contention."

When one is proud, he is going to try to have his own way no matter what. He will not concede that he has been wrong or that he could even be wrong. He is a self-centered, conceited man who is going to ram-rod his way through anything (or anybody) that would resist him.

It should be easy to admit error when one sees his mistake, but pride will not permit a person to make such an admission. He would rather defend himself though in error than to concede the truth. Thus, trouble arises through pride. And there are other ways too in which pride causes trouble.

III. PRIDE LEADS DOWN-NOT UP.

"A man's pride shall bring him low" (29:23). There is a lot in that simple statement. A man's pride is actually self-exaltation. A proud man lifts himself up. But, this proverb so wisely says that his pride will actually bring him down in time. And it will. As 16:18 says, "Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall."

Haman's pride brought his destruction. So did Nebuchadnezzar's make a beast of the field of him for seven years. Peter's trusting in his own moral strength led to his downfall, for he didn't watch and pray as he should have done. And the persons of the Bible, as well as the persons of any community, give one ample examples of this sad fact.

IV. PRIDE IS CONTRASTED WITH WISDOM.

A proud person glories in his exalted or inflated thoughts of himself. He thinks he is "it", or she

thinks she is "it". But, Proverbs lists pride as foolish and in a number of passages contrasts it with wisdom. 14:3 says, "In the mouth of the FOOLISH, is a rod of pride: but the lips of the wise shall preserve them." 11:2 says, "When pride cometh, then cometh shame: but with the lowly is wisdom." And 13:10 says, "Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom." One is not well advised who is proud in heart. He has been using the wrong standard of measure. He is viewing himself in the light of his own thoughts, and they are warped. Anyone is foolish who views himself primarily in the light of his own thoughts. What God thinks of us is always right, and the common consensus of thought concerning us is also to be taken into consideration.

Let us see, then, that pride has no chance to get a start in our hearts. Let us pull out the first appearance of it lest it grow and take possession of our hearts.

Anger Outlawed

James tells us that the wrath of man works not the righteousness of God, and it doesn't. We can see why God would oppose the wrath of man. The book of Proverbs takes up this subject and treats it from a number of very understandable and practical ways.

As long as I have known men, I have seen anger. I have never believed anything else than that it is terribly wrong, and as long as I have preached, I have earnestly preached against it with all my might. Some of the richest verses on this important subject are found in Proverbs. Let us see what that great book says upon it.

I. SOME ARE ALWAYS STIRRING UP HARD FEELINGS.

"A wrathful man," 15:18 says, "stirreth up strife." Some make it a point to have a perpetual upset attitude toward one or more individuals; some toward the bulk of people. Some people are well described by the expression "a wrathful man".

Listen to the way another proverb is expressed: "Surely the churning of milk bringeth forth butter, and the wringing of the nose bringeth forth blood: so the forcing of wrath bringeth forth strife" (30:33). Some cannot rest unless they are in a fight. Some never go to church until a fight of some sort is on. Having little character, due to being unprincipled or unbalanced, they keep forcing wrath just as this proverb says, and trouble aplenty ensues. They thrive on that.

19:19 says, "A man of great wrath shall suffer punishment: for if thou deliver him, yet thou must do it again." If you try to help a man who has gotten himself in trouble because of his wrathful deeds, you will have opportunity to do the same thing many more times too, for his punishment will do him little good. Again and again, he will exhibit his wrath toward others. Life is too tame unless he is having trouble with others.

II. THE WISE TRY TO KEEP DOWN WRATH.

It is easy to get into trouble, but not always easy to get out. Following your lower nature, you will have a number of opportunities to "have it out" with others. Only by following the strict course of the spiritual can you hope to have the grace and patience necessary to overcome evil done to you by good done back. Proverbs praises the person who tries to avoid wrath.

19:11 says, "The discretion (good judgment) of a man deferreth (delays) his anger; and it is his glory to pass over a transgression." A man's good judgment will cause him to be slow to anger. Such a one

will find it his glory to suffer wrongfully and like his Master to take it patiently. Do you glory in your desire to hold down trouble, or do you enjoy digging up evil and having trouble with your fellow men?

15:18 says, "He that is slow to anger appeaseth (stops) strife." You can see that God is pleased with the man slow to anger and praises him because he will cause strife to cease rather than to blaze.

III. WHAT PEOPLE SAY AND HOW THEY SAY IT ARE IMPORTANT.

I marvel not that some people have trouble. Their customary way of speaking is loud, thoughtless, and rough. Unless one controls his speech, the other person will have a time controlling his temper.

Listen to this great memory verse: "A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger" (15:1). A "soft" answer is just the opposite of a "harsh" answer. Like the virtuous woman, "the law of kindness: should be in our mouths. Oh the cutting things that people sometimes say to the man at the store. It may be to a neighbor. It may be to some person in the church. And yet they claim to be Christians. There isn't much Christianity to a person who has an unbridled tongue.

All it takes sometimes to get into a real fight is to say the wrong word. Many times everything is all set for trouble, and if you do not guard your speech, you are going to stir up anger rather than turn it away.

IV. ANGRY MEN ARE OUTRAGEOUS MEN.

"Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous" (27:4). Yes, wrath is cruel; anger is outrageous, unreasonable. I know of no better way of stating it. "A furious man aboundeth in transgression" (29:22). He will fight. He will curse his fellow men. He will destroy property. He will lose all his influence for good. He

will violate everything involved in the term "brotherliness". Yes, he abounds in transgression.

Like a river at flood time, he is all "out of banks". He has no control over himself. He will throw anything he can get his hands on. He will say anything that comes into his mind. He cares not where he is nor who sees him. How well is he described in 25:28, "He that hath no rule over his own spirit is like a city that is broken down, and without walls."

V. WE ARE NOT TO ASSOCIATE WITH A MAN IN HIS ANGER.

If we do, we are liable to get a cursing. We may become like him. 22:24 says, "Make no friendship with an angry man; and with a furious man thou shalt not go." Most of us don't need any special verse to cause us to leave such a person alone. Just plain common sense would say to select as our close friends those who are warm-hearted rather than hot-headed.

VI. BEING SLOW TO ANGER IS HELD UP AS A GREAT VIRTUE.

Listen to the number of times that Proverbs praises the man "slow to anger": "He that is SLOW TO WRATH is of great understanding; but he that is hasty of spirit exalteth folly" (14:29); "A wrathful man stirreth up strife; but he that is SLOW TO ANGER appeaseth strife" (15:18). "The discretion of a man DEFERRETH his anger" (19:11). "He that is SLOW TO ANGER is better than the mighty; and he that ruleth his spirit than he that taketh a city" (16:32).

Who can read these verses and think a quick temper is something that God will tolerate? He praises and commends the man who is slow to anger, but He condemns the individual whose temper is like the firecracker—just waiting to blow up when someone

ignites the fuse.

There are so many who need this teaching from Proverbs. If you are one of them, let the Spirit convict your heart of the terribleness of this sin and its consequences. Make it a real burden of your heart that you may be able to overcome it. Confer with another about your decision, and pray together for a complete victory over it.

Riches Discussed

Here is another subject handled in a comprehensive way in the book of Proverbs. It is a subject vital to everyday living as well as being one that is extremely interesting to all. These proverbs give us God's mind on the subject of material possessions.

I. RICHES AND HONOR ARE OFTEN CONNECTED IN PROVERBS.

Notice these instances: "Length of days is in her (wisdom's) right hand; and in her left hand riches and honour" (3:16); "Riches and honour are with me (wisdom)" (8:18); "By humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, and honour, and life" (22:4); and, "A gracious woman retaineth honour: and strong men retain riches" (11:16).

These passages indicate that riches—like length of days and honor—are something to be desired, providing, of course, that one uses them in the right way and has a godly attitude toward them. In other words, just as one can thank God for honor that comes his way, so can he thank God for material things that are his. Thus, riches themselves are not sinful as sometimes we are led to suppose.

II. ACTUALLY, POVERTY IS OFTEN DE-SERVED, BEING BUT THE RESULT OF

PEOPLE'S LAZINESS, DIVERSION, AND
FOOLISHNESS.

6:9-11 blames some people's poverty on their laziness: "How long wilt thou sleep, O sluggard? when wilt thou arise out of thy sleep? Yet a little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to sleep: so shall thy poverty come as one that travelleth (a hobo in those days), and thy want as an armed man." 10:4 again places the blame on indolence: "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand."

21:17 blames pleasure for other people's poverty: "He that loveth pleasure shall be a poor man. he that loveth wine and oil shall not be rich." Some are so pleasure-minded that they cannot keep their minds on their business enough to succeed. We have known others who wanted to hang around home for years, live off Dad, and while away their lives in pleasure. Such lack the ambition necessary to obtain material things. Others have drunk away a fortune.

21:20 blames a third thing—foolish spending: "There is treasure to be desired and oil in the dwelling of the wise: but a foolish man spendeth it up." Have you ever noticed how short a time some people keep money when they get it? No matter how much they get, it is gone within a short time. They know nothing about how to take care of money. They do not conceive of investing it wisely that it might serve them later on and that they might be in a position to do more good because of it. It never enters their minds to save some of it for an operation, prolonged sickness, or death. Money to them is here today, but gone tomorrow.

Poverty, when it is a result of laziness, pleasure-seeking, or foolish spending, is uncalled for, is actually a shame, and because it is, we need not be surprised if people take an offish attitude toward us. Proverbs indicates that they will: "The poor is

hated even of his own neighbour; but the rich hath many friends" (14:20); "Wealth maketh many friends; but the poor is separated from his neighbour" (19:4); and, "All the brethren of the poor do hate him: how much more do his friends go far from him? he pursues them with words, yet they are wanting to him" (19:7).

The wealthy class may not render too many real Christians to the cause, but I think you will find those who are financially solid are among the staunchest of Christians today.

III. GOD BLESSES IN A MATERIAL WAY THOSE WHO DO HIS WILL.

I have always appreciated the commandment and the promise of 3:9,10: "Honour the Lord with thy substance, and with the firstfruits of thine increase; so shall thy barns be filled with plenty, and thy presses shall burst out with new wine." In other words, if we will be fair with God, He will be more than fair with us. We can honor Him with our substance—we have to give it, of course, before it will honor Him. Furthermore, we are to honor Him with the firstfruits—not the left-overs. We are to honor Him with the firstfruits of all our increase—not merely a part of our increase. His promise is that we will have plenty.

Another promise: "The liberal soul shall be made fat: and he that watereth shall be watered also himself" (11:25). 11:28 makes this promise: "He that trusteth in his riches shall fall: but the righteous shall flourish as a branch."

Listen to this one: "The blessing of the Lord, it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it" (10:22). The trouble with so many people's riches is that they have not been made rich because of God so blessing them, but because of sinful gain. But, the blessing of the Lord does make rich, and the good

thing about it is that He doesn't add any sorrow to us with it. The gain of the world, though, is oftentimes followed by many sorrows. 15:6 comments upon this very fact when it says, "In the house of the righteous is much treasure: but in the revenues of the wicked is trouble." 15:27 also says, "He that is greedy of gain troubleth his own house."

Christians' goal is not necessarily great earthly possessions, but rather heavenly inheritance, yet at the same time, it is a comfort to know that we have a God in heaven who will so bless us that we can also enjoy earthly security.

IV. NATURALLY, THOUGH, A PERSON MUST DO HIS PART IN THE MATTER.

God will not bless us in the matter unless we do our part. 24:4 says, "By knowledge shall the chambers be filled with all precious and pleasant riches." We must do our part as referred to as "knowledge" in this verse. The more one knows, the easier it is to get a good-paying job, and the more one knows, the better he is going to watch the spending of that which he earns.

Applying oneself in labor is also of utmost importance: "He that gathered by labor shall increase" (13:11). Many people have a good sales territory, but they don't work hard enough at it. Many farmers have good soil, but they don't get on the ball, so to speak, when they should and take care of things as they should in order to make the most. Many could handle a few more hogs or a few more head of cattle, but they don't because it will be a little bit more work. Yet, those extra ones may make the big difference. They are already living off what they are now handling. The extras would give them the extra, which would begin to add up. No wonder 10:4 says, "The hand of the diligent maketh rich."

V. PROVERBS KNOWS HOW PEOPLE DO.

The mind that guided the pens of the Bible writers knew people. We see it demonstrated in the following verses.

Listen to 20:14: "It is naught, it is naught, saith the buyer; but when he is gone his way, then he boasteth." To understand that, let us go to the second-hand car lot. A salesman comes in bragging to the boss about the fine car he just bought, but in order to do so, he found every scratch and every nick, he criticized the many miles on it, he told how much work they were going to have to put on the car before they could move it, etc. This matter of the buyer excessively depreciating the product he is purchasing and then gloating over how cheap he bought it is not new. It is as old as the Proverbs and older.

Listen to this one about the loan business, and you would think it was written in the twentieth century: "The rich ruleth over the poor, and the borrower is servant to the lender" (22:7). Yes, to the tune of 6% or more today! The poor man needs money. He doesn't have the principal, yet he is going to have to repay the entire principal being borrowed and also pay a portion extra for interest. If he has not been able in the past to save money for this occasion, will he be able in the coming year to do so much better that he can not only pay the amount, but a sizable interest percentage on top of it? To do so, it keeps his nose to the grindstone as he is a servant to the lender.

We can also see the present truth in 18:23: "The poor useth intreaties; but the rich answereth roughly." Why does the poor use entreaties? He is trying to get some help out of the rich. He has to use entreaties. Why does the rich answer roughly? Because he is financially independent, and he delights in showing people his authority.

VI. PROVERBS EVEN INCLUDES SOME THOUGHTS ON INHERITANCES.

13:22 says, "A good man leaveth an inheritance to his children's children." Most people desire, if possible, to leave something to their children. In a sense, it is a final gift and remembrance, and it usually comes in mighty handy. Most of us will not have to worry about leaving a great lot to our children, but it is a desire that we might be able to leave them something that will bring help to them. Proverbs says it is a "good man" that does this. "Houses and riches." 19:14 says, "are the inheritance of fathers."

But, some people don't know what to do with money that is left them. 20:21 says, "An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed." A good example of that was the example of the man who kidnapped the Greenlease boy several years ago. In six months before the kidnapping, he went through \$200,000 left him. He had gotten so accustomed to spending money during that spree that he wasn't content to work for sensible earnings, so he conceived the kidnapping case as a means of obtaining much money without having to work. Every parent ought to be rearing up his sons and daughters in such a way that they will wisely use the money that may be left them.

VII. PROVERBS SETS FORTH THE IDEAL STATE.

The writer requested, "Give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain" (30:8, 9). There are dangers connected with having either too great an abundance or not enough. The rich may forget the Lord entirely, and the poor may feel driven to steal and other ungodly practices in order to get money. The writer said he preferred being neither rich on the one hand nor poor on the other. I personally believe that his idea

is actually the ideal way to live—to have plenty, but not more than one is able to have and maintain his spiritual balance.

Some well-to-do people bank too much on their money. They think they can get away with anything merely because they have money. They can bluff their way through. They can hire the best lawyer. They can carry their case to the highest court. They can keep on with the trial indefinitely. As 18:11 says, "The rich man's wealth is his strong city, and as an high wall in his own conceit." People may try that here, but that will not work when they face God. 11:14 says, "Riches profit not in the day of wrath: but righteousness delivereth from death." Riches may get a man places here, but they will cut no ice with God on the day of judgment. Then he will have wished he had sought the kingdom of God and righteousness first, for he would have had earthly provisions and would be prepared to stand before God.

Fools Considered

In some ways, to be called a fool cuts people deeper than to be called a sinner. They do not find it hard to accept the fact of having sinned, for they know that such but puts them into a class with all the rest of humanity, but when they are called a fool, that seems like a personal jab, which is not easily taken. But, the book of Proverbs uses the plainest talk in recognizing that many qualify themselves to be called fools, and it is the purpose of this message to consider some of those things that Proverbs says about fools.

I. FOOLS PAY NO ATTENTION TO WISDOM.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (1:7). "A fool despiseth his father's instruction: but

he that regardeth reproof is prudent" (15:5). Such a person will turn his back on the very instruction that would make something of him. He pays no attention to what others try to tell him. He goes on his way, not realizing he has turned his back upon sound counsel. 24:7 puts it so briefly, but so correctly. "Wisdom is too high for a fool."

12:15 says, "The way of a fool is right in his own eyes: but he that hearkeneth unto counsel is wise." We have all seen living demonstrations of this. We may not always see fit to do everything that everybody tries to get us to do, but we should give sensible consideration to those things we are told. Probably most things we can accept, and we should.

10:8 continues, "The wise in heart will receive commandments: but a prating fool shall fall." And 29:9 says, "If a wise man contendeth with a foolish man, whether he rage or laugh, there is no rest." In this last passage, you will notice the usual responses given by fools to the wise efforts of others in their behalf—they will either get angry (rage) or make fun (laugh). Wisdom is too high for fools, but they don't know it.

II. FOOLS THINK IT IS SMART TO SIN.

"It is as sport to a fool to do mischief" (10:23). They think it is smart to cuss somebody out. Some think it is smart to smoke more cigarettes or drink more beers than others. One fool will brag to another fool about how many women he has had. Proverbs has well pin-pointed such people when it calls them fools.

We can surely see the truth of 14:9, "Fools make a mock at sin."

You try to get a fool to repent of his sinful ways, and he will make fun of you and laugh about sin. He is not about to give up his crowd and his fun. Nothing would be more miserable to him than to settle down and live the Christian life. To him, nothing would

be more miserable; therefore, to him, nothing is more unthinkable. 13:19 says, "It is abomination to fools to depart from evil." He doesn't think any evil is going to come upon him because of the way he is living. 14:16 puts it like this, "A wise man feareth and departeth from evil: but the fool rageth, and is confident."

III. FOOLS ARE KNOWN BY THEIR SPEECH.

Listen to 15:14: "The heart of him that hath understanding seeketh knowledge: but the mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness." If you need any commentary on this verse, just go down to the corner store or to the garage or to the barber shop—just anywhere that men with time on their hands gather—and listen to them for ten minutes, and you will well understand the statement, "The mouth of fools feedeth on foolishness." The chances are, you will not hear one thing that will build you up or do you any good, but will hear a lot of vocal drivel that depicts nothing but shallowness of thought, and such will go on all day long!

Another vocal mark of a fool is that he tells everything he knows. 29:11 says, "A fool uttereth all his mind." He will freely talk concerning his financial matters or his business dealings. He will not hesitate to tell you how much money he has or how much he made or how much he sold his car for. For some reason, he wants everybody to know everything about him, so he tells everything he knows.

But, not only does he talk about his own things—he talks about everybody else's things too. And this gets him into trouble. 18:7 says, "A fool's mouth is his destruction."

Furthermore, a fool weaves into his conversation all the rude words, all the vulgar words, and all the latest delinquents' expressions. His speech is marked by all kinds of grammatical errors. Nothing of good literature is ever upon his tongue. No statement from the pen of David or from the pens of the

great secular writers ever is upon his lips. In short, 17:7 says, "Excellent speech becometh not a fool."

IV. FOOLS OFTEN FIND THEMSELVES IN TROUBLE.

"A fool's lips enter into contention, and his mouth calleth for strokes" (18:6). To be whipped was a part of public correction in Bible times. Fools then as now were always getting themselves in difficulty with the law. They refused to be guided by the laws that had been made. That is why 19:29 says, "Judgments are prepared for scorers, and stripes for the back of fools."

Fools are usually trouble-makers. 20:3 says, "It is an honour for a man to cease from strife (and the wise usually try to avoid trouble as much as possible): but every fool will be meddling (quarrelling—R.V.)." The righteous try to get things settled as quickly as possible, but fools are always trying to stir up trouble and to keep the fires of contention burning.

A fool also has an ungoverned temper that is ready to explode at the slightest provocation. "A fool's wrath is presently known" (12:16). And it is an unreasonable wrath too. "A stone is heavy, and the sand weighty; but a fool's wrath is heavier than them both" (27:3). In fact, so unreasonable and so cruel can the wrath of a fool be that 17:12 says, "Let a bear robbed of her whelps meet a man, rather than a fool in his folly."

V. THE WORTHLESS LIFE OF A FOOL.

While "a prudent man concealeth knowledge," the "heart of fools proclaimeth foolishness" (12:23). In keeping with the foregoing, 18:2 says, "A fool hath no delight in understanding, but that his heart may discover (or reveal) itself." And 13:16 similarly adds, "Every prudent man dealeth with knowledge: but a fool layeth open his folly."

Listen to this proverb, "The crown of the wise is their riches: but the foolishness of fools is folly" (14:24).

This next passage is better known for its appearance in Peter's writings. Notice the way it is worded in the book of Proverbs: "As a dog returneth to his vomit, so a fool returneth to his folly" (26:11). This repulsive picture is God's picture of the life of the fool. Fools themselves are not aware that they appear this way.

"Delight (delicate living—R.V.) is not seemly for a fool" (19:10).

VI. WE ARE WARNED ABOUT TAKING UP WITH FOOLS.

How true is the statement made in 13:20, "He that walketh with wise men shall be wise: but a companion of fools shall be destroyed." Why does God warn people about becoming a companion of fools? Because there are those who seem to know no better than to throw themselves into the direct influence of those whom God labels as fools. Anybody who has no more judgment than to take up with fools will probably not have enough judgment to preserve him from becoming like them.

Again God warns, "Go from the presence of a foolish man, when thou perceivest not in him the lips of knowledge" (14:7). This is more than a warning; it is a commandment. It shows that we must make judgment of others in order to know with whom to be companions and with whom not to be.

Especially do those who are younger (immature in judgment) and those who are known for being easily affected by their surroundings need to regard these true warnings from Proverbs.

VII. MOST FOOLS ARE HOPELESS OF IMPROVING.

26:3 says, "A whip for the horse, a bridle for the ass, and a rod for the fool's back." The fool has plenty of things to be corrected about, but correction usually doesn't accomplish what it should. "A reproof entereth more into a wise man than an hundred stripes into a fool" (17:10). It is a sad fact that one word of reproof to a wise person who will listen will actually do more good than one hundred stripes on the back of a fool.

This fact is brought out very vividly in 27:22: "Though thou shouldest bray (pound) a fool in a mortar (a bowl used for grinding grain) with a pestle (the beater), yet will not his foolishness depart from him." In other words, if one would beat on a fool like a person beating grain in grinding it, yet will a fool go on in his foolishness. Most men who serve prison terms go out and commit similar deeds that bring them right back to jail. The problem child in the first year of school is usually still a fool in his twelfth year.

How hopeless it sounds when God says in 23:9, "Speak not in the ears of a fool: for he will despise the wisdom of thy words." Stripes do him no good, and here we are told that words will do him no good. It is no wonder that God is going to consign all fools to hell. He has put up with their foolishness all the time here. Why should He put up with it forever? He won't!