

Unburdened of Pride (1 Corinthians 3 & 4)

For the Travelling Light Series

August 20, 2023

By Pastor David Fields

“Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next person. We say that people are proud of being rich, clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being *richer*, or *cleverer*, or *better looking* than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about.

– C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

Pride in the way Lewis is talking about it, is really all about *comparing and competing*.

I. The Problem

“Brothers and sisters, I could not address you as people who live by the Spirit but as people who are still worldly—mere infants in Christ. ² I gave you milk, not solid food, for you were not yet ready for it. Indeed, you are still not ready. ³ You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans? ⁴ For when one says, “I follow Paul,” and another, “I follow Apollos,” are you not mere human beings?”

- 1 Corinthians 3:1-4

When we compare, what are we doing? We make a judgement call. Like, “Do I look down on you, and feel superior, or do I sense you’re looking down on me, and feel envious and resentful?”

The Potential Results of Comparison:

- A) Resenting that other person, and maybe even trying to undermine who they are, through gossip or slander, or just being cold toward them.
- B) It might come out in a need to compete with them; to prove we are “better than” the other. And it’s usually much more subtle.

“Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn the meaning of the saying, “Do not go beyond what is written.” Then you will not be **puffed up** in being a follower of one of us over against the other. For who makes you different than anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, **why do you boast** as though you did not?”

– 1 Corinthians 4:6-7

Paul does not use the typical word for pride here, but the Greek word *phusio*: it means “puffed up”, or “bloated”; like an organ of the body that is filled up with air.

“...we hustle for our worthiness by constantly performing, perfecting, pleasing, and proving.”

– Brene Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection*

“My drive-in life comes from a fear of being mediocre. That is always pushing me. I push past one spell of it and discover myself as a special human being but then I feel I am still mediocre and uninteresting unless I do something else. Because even though I have become somebody, I still have to prove that I am somebody. My struggle has never ended, and I guess it never will.”

– Madonna, *Vogue*

“What Paul is looking for, what Madonna is looking for, what we are all looking for, is an *ultimate* verdict that we are important and valuable. We look for an ultimate verdict every day in all the situations and people around us. And that means that every single day, we are on trial.”

– Tim Keller, *The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness*

The Verdict:

Paul says: “I care very little if I am judged by you or by any human court; indeed, I do not even judge myself” (4:3).

Paul is *happy* that Jesus is his judge, and not the people around him, or even his own thoughts about himself – both of which are unstable and shift up and down all the time. Because Jesus is the same God who made him, loves him, and gave his life to acquit him.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”

– Galatians 2:20

When we transfer our allegiance, our loyalty, our trust to Jesus, we find that the trial is over. You and I now have been given the ultimate verdict we have been looking for. Loved. Accepted. That’s the verdict. Now, we can live *out of that* verdict. The verdict about *who we are* now can become the place that leads to our performance – leads us to want to live simply in response to all that God has done for us.

II. The Process

Jesus, in welcoming us to take on his “yoke” means adopting the entirety of his pattern of life – and, at heart, that means deep connection and intimacy within the circle of love that is shared within the Triune God. Jesus is *praying* when he turns to his disciples and says, “Come to me...” (Matt 11:28).

That invitation is a welcome into the circle of love, shared by Father, Son, and Holy Spirit for all eternity. Yes, this will mean living according to his teachings, too. But that’s not where it starts.

It begins as we step inside this conversation that has been going on for all of eternity, when we take up this way of life, we enter that process of becoming more and more like Jesus – the one who shows us how to be what God always intended.

Notice how he describes himself: “Come to me...for I am humble and gentle of heart...” Why come to him? Why learn from him? The same reason we can be glad that he is our judge: because he’s “Humble and gentle of heart.” He will gently guide and direct us to live more and more out of our true identity as his beloved children.

Jesus invites us to “learn from him,” and that will mean being transformed, slowly but surely, into his very likeness – to have that same kind of humility and gentleness of heart we see in him.

Listen to how Paul speaks about himself to the Corinthians: “By the humility and gentleness of Christ, I appeal to you...” – 2 Corinthians 10:1. That’s the exact same language we see in Jesus’ invitation. And now Paul says he’s living with that approach in his relationships with others.

III. The Product

Stepping inside the life Jesus offers means adopting his way of humility and gentleness as well. So, the fruit, the result is that we are reflective of Jesus own character. When we do, we can truly build each other up, and demonstrate the goodness of Jesus to the watching world.

Humility:

“Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man, he will be what most people call ‘humble’ nowadays: he will not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seems like a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what *you* said to *him*. If you do dislike him, it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all.” – C.S. Lewis

A) The Freedom of Self-Forgetfulness

A humble person doesn’t need to bring everything back to him or herself. They just have a genuine interest in you, and you can tell.

Humility, then, is not thinking less of yourself but thinking of yourself...less. It’s the freedom of self-forgetfulness.

Of course, we’ll have moments where we step back onto the rollercoaster of our ego – but that’s what confession is for. It’s this beautiful invitation to hear Jesus’ pronounce the verdict over us once again: Loved. Accepted. A child of God.

B) Escaping the Tyranny of “Cool”

“We hustle for our worthiness by slipping on the emotional straitjacket of cool and posturing as the tragically hip and the terminally “better than.” Being “in control” isn’t always about the desire

to manipulate situations, but often it's about the need to manage perceptions. We want to be able to control what other people think about us so that we can feel good enough" – Brene Brown

A humble person doesn't take themselves too seriously.

Because we've let go of the straitjacket of trying to curate and perform an identity, we are freed to not worry of how we are perceived. This kind of person will more readily just own their mistakes, and not be crushed when they do fail. Those who are humble have been freed from this sort of armor we wear of self-defensiveness because they trust the love and forgiveness of God.

This is what happens when we say "yes" to Jesus' invitation to take on his way of life, his yoke – that it really is "light" and "easy".

The humble can celebrate the giftedness and successes of those around them.

When we are secure in our identity in Christ, we can honestly and truly value the gifts and unique contributions of those around us and get to work on the things God has given us to do, without the need for comparison or competition. Sometimes the best way to move toward this is to publicly affirm and speak well of that person you may be tempted to compete with.

Just imagine with me for a moment: a whole community that was free of comparing and free of the need to find our value in our performance, but was constantly affirming the value and gifting of one another, encouraging everyone to use their God given gifts out of love? Would you want to be a part of that? By his grace, that's exactly what God is making us into.

For Further Reflection:

- 1) In 1 Corinthians 4 Paul speaks of how neither the community, nor even himself provide the basis for judging him, that role belongs to Jesus alone. And Jesus is both his judge and the one who acquits him. Embracing this reality frees him from competing with anyone else – from the rollercoaster of an ego that is constantly puffed up, then deflated. And he says that he is using this perspective as an example for the church community to follow (1 Cor 4:6-7).
 - A. What are the ways you may be tempted to carry the burden of pride – of comparing and competing with others?
 - B. How might adopting the same perspective as Paul free you from the rollercoaster? How would reflecting regularly on the beauty of the gospel – that Son of God loved you and gave himself up for you – bring you relief from that burden?
 - C. Take the next few minutes to commit Galatians 2:20 to memory so that you can remind yourself of this fact.

“I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I now live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.”
– Galatians 2:20

- 2) In the final section of the message, we looked at three statements about those who have been freed to live with real humility:
 - A. A humble person doesn't need to bring everything back to him or herself. They just have a genuine interest in you, and you can tell.
 - B. A humble person doesn't take themselves too seriously.
 - C. The humble can celebrate the giftedness and successes of those around them.

Which of these three do you seem to do most naturally? How can you continue to deepen that habit? Which of these do you need to give more thoughtful, prayerful attention to? Take some time to ask God for the grace to practice this regularly.