

This year we are focusing as a church on God and His ability to transform us to become more and more like Christ. Our key verse is found on the front page of your bulletin. 2 Corinthians 3:18 - "And we all with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another. Last fall, we asked the question "where do we see the glory of the Lord today?" We can see it in creation. We can see it in Jesus - His life and ministry. But we can most clearly see it in His Word. So we spent the fall asking what we really think of the Bible. We answered a number of questions regarding it. My hope in that series was to encourage you to overcome the obstacles that keep you from reading and taking in the Bible. If we're not taking in God's Word, it's very likely we will not see much of the Lord's glory and experience transformation because of it.

Since Christmas, we've focused on understanding our hearts from God's perspective in the book of Proverbs. We've taken a deeper dive into our hearts. We've looked at desires, temptation and emotions. This is important because we can talk about transformation as some broad abstract category. We can agree we need to be transformed. But what does that actually look like in our everyday lives? Understanding our hearts, desires, temptation and emotions moves away from the abstract to the everyday.

Now we are going to get really personal. As we continue this series on understanding our hearts from God's perspective, we will look at 7 specific sins that can be found in our hearts and our need for transformation from each one of them.

The 7 sins we will look at come from a more famous list called the 7 deadly sins. **What are the 7 deadly sins?** The sins themselves are **pride, envy, anger, greed, sloth, gluttony and lust**. But why these 7 and why call them deadly? All sin is deadly. So how did these 7 end up with the title of deadly? They come from a list developed by a 4th century Christian monk called Evagrius of Pontus. He identified 8 thoughts from which he believed all other sins flowed. So he saw them as roots that led to other sins. He produced some sort of listing of these 8 to help Christian communities identify these patterns and grow in holiness away from them. So his list became a diagnostic tool like a spiritual checkup. This list spread through Christianity in the Western part of Europe.

Then in the 500's a pope named Gregory revised the 8 to 7. In the 1300's another theologian took the list and identified them as mortal or capital sins. But during the Reformation in the 1500's, the Protestant Reformers rejected the capital or mortal sin designation. They could not find this listing in Scripture. So the 7 were slowly abandoned in protestant circles and more focus was placed on other lists such as found in Colossians 3.¹

I think it can be harmful to focus on one list of sins as more deadly than others. It can encourage us to think some sins are more or less serious when all sin is deadly and must be taken seriously. But I also argue with Evagrius that these 7 can lead to a lot of other sin. These 7 can at least help us identify specific ways we might be living in rebellion against God. They also help us see our need for transformation in these areas. They call to our attention the need to battle against specific sin in our lives. In Colossians 3:5, Pastor John Owen wrote to 'Mortify or Put to death therefore, whatever is earthly in you.' Do you mortify? Do you make it your daily work? You must always be at it while you live; do not take a day off from this work; always be killing sin or it will be killing you."²

So over the next 7 messages we will work through each sin and it's opposite which we need God to grow in our lives.

So today we start with pride and himility. **What is pride?** Well, there is a good type of pride. You can take pride in your work. That means you want to do a good job. You can take pride in your children maturing. That's a celebration of children progressing to the next point. But there is such a thing as sinful pride. One dictionary defines it as **unreasonable and excessive self-esteem**. It can be **taking pleasure in having more of something than the next person**. CS Lewis wrote "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, or 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."³ Pride is **a refusal to let God be God**. Lewis Smede writes "Pride is turning down God's invitation to be a creature in his garden and wishing instead to be the Creator, independent, reliant on one's own resources. Os Guinness writes "It was through pride that the devil became the devil. Pride leads to every other vice; it is the complete anti-God state of mind." So pride in our hearts is a concern for the serious Christian.

¹ Ryan Griffith, "A Brief History of Iniquity: How the Deadly Sins became Seven" in Killjoys: The Seven Deadly Sins, Ed. Marshall Segal, © 2015 Desiring God, Published by Desiring God, Post Office Box 2901, Minneapolis, MN 55402, www.desiringGod.org.

² John Owen, The Mortification of Sin, 1656, Abridged by Richard Rushing, Banner of Truth, Edinburgh, 2007, 5.

³ CS Lewis – Mere Christianity.

Another author, Jason Meyer writes “Fighting pride is like fighting a shape shifter. It can appear in forms that look like polar opposites: building up ourselves and tearing down ourselves.”⁴ Then he talks about six interrelated forms. Three come from the building up side of pride: **Self-Exaltation, Self Promotion and Self-Justification**. These three can show up when we succeed and others fail.

I think we more easily understand this kind of pride. Self-exaltation takes credit for good things in our lives. Self-promotion puts those good things forward so others will give us credit for them. “Look at how beautiful I am or how good I am at something.” That’s self-promotion. Self-Justification takes credit for being in the right and blames others for being in the wrong. Meyer writes “these three forms of pride all propose a toast to self, celebrating and showing off our successes. And they often raise their glasses with an acute awareness of the failure of others.

Three other forms of pride come from the tearing down side: **Self-Degradation, Self-Demotion and Self-Condernation**. These three show up when others succeed and we fail or we think we’ve failed. This is a less obvious form of pride. Some might even mistake it for humility. This side can occur when others succeed and we fail or others have and we don’t have. Instead of raising a glass to success, this kind of pride throws a pity party. Where self-exaltation builds self up, self degradation tears self down. Self-promotion brings successes to the attention of others. Self-demotion throws the pity part in front of others. This is a sneaky kind of self-promotion because we’re actually fishing for affirmation and reassurance we think we deserve. Then self-condernation passes judgment on ourselves. We mentally replay poor performances and beat ourselves up over our failures. But how can this be pride? Well the common denominator of all six is self-preoccupation. Pride wants to be the center of attention for good and for bad. Pride is fixated on self.

So with these definitions and forms of sinful pride in mind, let’s look at some Proverbs that address Pride. Then we will see how we lean on God for humility in us. The text is Proverbs 30:11-14. It’s on page 476 in the Bibles in front of you. I will be reading from the English Standard Version. It shows how pride shows up in our lives.

Proverbs 30:11-14 (ESV)

¹¹ There are those who curse their fathers
and do not bless their mothers.

⁴ Jason Meyer, “Pride,” in Killjoys.

¹²There are those who are clean in their own eyes
but are not washed of their filth.

¹³There are those—how lofty are their eyes,
how high their eyelids lift!

¹⁴There are those whose teeth are swords,
whose fangs are knives,
to devour the poor from off the earth,
the needy from among mankind.

This passage comes in the form of a Proverb that describes reality. There are no commands or prescriptions. It makes observations about life and people. These verses describe those who reject the way of wisdom. Some commentators see a sequence or progression almost like these are steps in pride.

What does pride lead to in our lives? Pride leads to a hatred of authority. Verse 11 talks about someone who struggles with the first authority figure in their lives – their parents. “There are some who curse their fathers and do not bless their mothers.” So this person resists their parents in some ways. Cursing a father was considered an irreverent action in a society that honored their parents. It also violated the 5th commandment – to honor your father and mother. Refusing to bless a mother might have involved both a lack of verbal and material blessing. They didn’t have nursing homes or care facilities back in ancient Israel. Adult children were expected to take care of their aging parents. But it seems this person resisted this responsibility.

Now parents are not perfect. I know. I am an imperfect parent. But God provided parents to children as their caregivers and teachers about life. Parents have a God-given authority to lead and raise their children well. Children have a responsibility to show respect to and obey their parents. This doesn’t apply when parents ask or command children to sin. But an attitude of respect and obedience is consistently commanded in Scriptures. Ephesians 6:1 states “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right.” Or Colossians 3:20 – “Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.”

I think one reality we face today is the widespread disdain and disrespect for authority across our culture. Children see examples of others disobeying their parents or rebelling against authority all over the place. It looks fun and freeing to disregard a parent's authority. But this verse ties such an attitude to a heart that rejects wisdom is filled with pride. So children, young people, how are you doing at this? How is that obedience towards your parents going? Do you show them respect and honor their wishes? Or might you hate their authority in your life? This could be a symptom of pride in your heart. And what about the rest of us? How do we respond to authority in our lives? The police, a speed limit sign, a supervisor, the government? If we hate authority, it could signal pride.

What else does pride lead to? Verse 12 teaches us that pride can lead to **blindness to our flaws**. "There are those who are clean in their own eyes but are not washed of their filth." So this person thinks they are clean. But in fact they are filthy. It's not talking about actual dirt. It's talking about flaws of character that the person does not see in themselves.

Now how might we discover this as a problem in our lives if we're blind to it?

One indicator is a resistance to constructive criticism. Pride makes it difficult to receive advice or criticism. Tim Keller writes "You can't learn from your mistakes or admit your own weaknesses when you're proud. Everything has to be blamed on other people or other causes. You have to maintain an image of yourself as a competent person, as someone who is better than other people. One of the most famous proverbs speaks to this. Proverbs 16:18 – "Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall." It doesn't say pride might lead to destruction. It will. And if we resist advice or criticism, we will continue to be blind to our own faults and mistakes that need correction.

Another way blindness to our flaws might show up is through touchiness. If we are touchy or easily offended, we might have a pride problem. If someone says something you don't like, do you immediately shoot back? What is so touchy about us? We might feel we need to defend our glory or honor or our ego. But the ego constantly calls attention to itself. It wants us to think about ourselves and how we're being treated or mistreated. But sin has distorted our identity. We

need saving, repairing grace. When we grow in this, we learn that there is glory in overlooking an offense or letting some slight or irritation go without paying back. Proverbs 19:11 states “A person’s wisdom yields patience; it is to one’s glory to overlook an offense.” But if you can’t overlook an offense - you might be prideful.

So pride can lead us to hate authority and to blindness over our own faults. Proverbs 30:13 paints a more common picture of a prideful person. “There are those – how lofty are their eyes, how high their eyelids lift!” Pride can cause us to **look down on others**. I have to admit that I struggled with this verse. What does it mean to have lofty eyes? Well according to this verse, the proud person lifts up their pupils to look down on others. Tim Keller writes “They don’t look people in the eye to understand and engage them as equals. They look past them to the goals they have for themselves, for which others are mere instruments, objects. They see others as a means to an end, as dispensers of acclaim, admiration, and other ways to bolster their self-image. Pride makes sympathy nearly impossible. Pride keeps us from really noticing people, from putting ourselves in their shoes, from recognizing when they are hurting or unhappy. It keeps us absorbed with our own agenda and needs. If the proud see someone suffering, they think they are too smart to let that happen to them, or they feel too sorry for themselves about their own problems to care about someone else’s.” So pride can lead us to be unsympathetic.

This tendency to look down can show up in our attitude towards other believers. Do we look down on other Christians who worship differently or don’t align completely with us on every part of Christianity? Jonathan Edwards was an American pastor in the 1700’s in New England. He lived through a time of spiritual revival in that region. Some great spiritual breakthroughs happened. But there were also excesses causing great concern among some Christians. Yet some Christians with concerns were quick to judge and look down on those who had participated in these excesses. Edwards wrote an entire book called “Religious affections” to help the church of that time discern the authenticity of a truly transformed person. But he also leveled some significant criticism at those who quickly looked down on fellow believers.

He writes “Spiritual pride tends to speak of other persons’ sins with bitterness or with laughter and an air of contempt. But pure Christian humility rather tends either to be silent about these problems or to speak of them with grief and pity. Spiritual pride is very apt to suspect others, but a humble Christian is most guarded about himself. He is as suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart. The proud person is apt to find fault with other believers, that they are low in grace, and to be quick to note their deficiencies. But the humble Christian has so much to do at home and sees so much evil in his own heart and is so concerned about it that he is not apt to be very busy with other hearts. He is apt to esteem others better than himself.”⁵ We need to really guard against the tendency to look down on other Christians. If we find ourselves quickly judging or tearing down someone else, we might have a serious pride issue.

Then comes verse 14. This teaches us that Pride can lead to **ruthless and unjust behavior towards those with less power**. It seems, from this verse, that the ruthlessness comes from the mouth. It talks about teeth as swords and fangs as knives. These swords and knives devour the poor and the needy. So how could a person get to this point? Well it may have started when they hated the authority of their parents. Then they became blind to their own faults. They also looked down on others. So with no authority over them, blindness to their own need for correction and looking down on others, they justify ruthless and unjust behavior to those weaker than them. That’s a lot about pride in just 4 verses.

But God can transform the proud into the humble through His Gospel!

So how do we grow in humility? Humble Yourself before God. Proverbs 3:34 – God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble. 1 Peter 5:6-7 state “Humble yourselves, therefore, under the mighty hand of God so that at the proper time he may exalt you, casting all your anxieties on him, because he cares for you.” Matthew 5:3 – Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. We must recognize that compared to God, we are poor in spirit. God is

⁵ Jonathan Edwards, Thoughts on the Revival.

God and we are not. We must humble ourselves before Him and admit our need of Him. Proverbs 1:7 states “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” He comes first – not Self but Christ.

The Christian life begins with a willingness to lay down our pride and meet God as our Savior. Jason Meyer writes “The glory of God and the pride of man will collide at one of two crash sites: hell or the cross. Either we will pay for our sins in hell or Christ will pay for our sins on the cross. Hell is the scene of a crash that never ends – a horror movie without credits. And every sinner deserves it. Justice says the story could end right there on that eternal note of terror. But God in his mercy made another way.” At the cross, Jesus paid for our sins. Seeing the cross with the eyes of faith defeats our pride. This is the essential first step to dealing with our pride. We must receive the Gospel and accept that we could do nothing to save ourselves. Then in turning to Christ, we begin the journey of growing in a God centered humility. But first, we must humble ourselves before Christ and receive Him as our Savior.

Deliberately submit yourselves to correction from others. Proverbs 13:18 states – “Whoever disregards discipline or instruction comes to poverty and shame but whoever heeds correction is honored.” A person who heeds correction is honored. There are several ways we can incorporate this into our lives. One way that I experience is in reading the Bible. When I read prayerfully, sometimes the Holy Spirit stops me on a verse. It’s like God impresses on me that He wants me to see something. My life that needs change.

But we can also submit ourselves to the correction of others. “This can happen inside the church, if we submit to the counsel and instruction of wise leaders or brothers and sisters we trust. This can happen in a marriage if we make it safe for our spouse to correct us. This can happen when we give Christian friends the right to speak to us regularly about our flaws and sins. It can happen, but only if you choose for correction to be a part of your life.

At work you could approach your supervisor and ask “are there ways I could improve? Is there something I’m missing? At home, you could ask your spouse the same questions and maybe even your children. It takes courage but it is also the path to honor. Humble yourself before God. Open self up to correction.

Learn not to think more or less of yourself but think of yourself less. . CS Lewis came up with this one. He writes, “If we were to meet a truly humble person, we would never come away from meeting them thinking they were humble. They would not always be telling us they were a nobody (because a person who keeps saying they are a nobody is actually a self-obsessed person). The thing we would remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally interested in us. Because the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself but thinking of myself less.” But how do we do that? Anchor your identity not to what others think; not to what we think but to what God thinks. That’s what 1 Corinthians 4:3-4 speaks about. The Apostle Paul writes to the Corinthians and says “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. For I am not aware of anything against myself, but I am not thereby acquitted. It is the Lord who judges me” Paul says he entrust the judgment or evaluation of himself ultimately to God. We’ve just said it is important to take in feedback from others. But we have to sift that feedback through God’s lens. We must entrust the ultimate evaluation of ourselves to God, then we can stop constantly thinking about ourselves. God’s assessment of us is perfect. He knows all about us – good and bad – Yet He loves us deeply. He paid for our sins by sending His Son for us. Now He loves us and accepts us, He sings over us and rejoices that we are His children. When we can rest in that, we can think of ourselves less and instead moved forward on His calling upon our lives.

Friends, pride is a multi-layered and somewhat disguised sin that can permeate our lives. We need it purged from us. We need to grow in Gospel humility. The good news is that in turning to God and submitting our lives to Him, He will do

the work of transforming us from proud to humble people for His glory. Let's ask Him to continue that work now in our lives in prayer.