

Pride and Humility

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[0 : 00] that would be continuing in the very sin that God has rescued us from in the first place. You see, God has not just saved us from something, from a life of sin, but he saved us for something.

An intimate relationship with him, a life spent honoring him. So the series that we're starting on tonight called Seven Deadly Sins is all about honoring the God who has bought us at a price. He didn't buy us so that we can go, awesome, fantastic, I just sit around. He actually bought us to be his people. He didn't just save us from something, but he has saved us for something. He saved us from a life that dishonored him to a life that actually honors him. And so church, friends, is not a holding pen for Christians. It's not the sort of like the garage that God sort of shoves us in until one day he gets interested in us again and sort of takes us back home to heaven or something like that.

The Bible says that God has forgiven our sin and now he wants to kill it in us. He's removed the penalty for our sin and now he wants to remove the presence of it as well.

[1 : 05] The Bible says this, we need to put sin to death in Colossians 3.5. Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature, sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry.

But Colossians also says that we don't just die a death, but we actually rise to a new life. So a few verses earlier says, Since then we have been raised with Christ. Set your hearts on things above where Christ is seated, the right hand of God.

Being a Christian is not just about dying a death, it's actually about rising to a new life. It's not just Jesus on the cross, it's him resurrected as well. When we became a Christian, one life ends, a totally new one begins.

One with new priorities, where if Christ is at the center, we follow him. And this is how Colossians 3 verses 9 to 10 puts it, Do not lie to each other since you have taken off your old self with its practices and have put on the new self which is being renewed in the knowledge of the image of its creator.

In the Christian life, we must first put our trust in Jesus to be forgiven, and then we must put on the character of Christ and be transformed. This is what it says in verse 12 of Colossians 3, Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience.

[2 : 25] That is, if you're a Christian, then you have this sort of sign which sort of sticks over your head which says, Under New Management. I'm under new management. And there are countless changes that God wants to work in your life before we enter his presence forever.

And so this series, if you like, is in effect doing radical surgery. This series in the next seven weeks is about going under the knife and allowing God to open up our lives and to cut out those bits which are just so deeply held sins.

And so will you allow God to do a deep work in your hearts? Will you allow him to radically do surgery on your character? What is it that needs the most treatment for you right now?

What death and resurrection is most needed in your life? You see, we can pick on a number of sins from the Bible, but the seven we're going to pick on is pride, anger, envy, impurity, gluttony, laziness and greed.

That's enough to keep us going for a while. And maybe this is quite timely for you. Maybe you've become a Christian. You've opened the door to Jesus into your life, but you've sort of opened the front door to him and you're allowing him in the hallway, but you're shutting off all the rest of the rooms to him.

[3 : 41] Maybe there's the odd room he's allowed in, but generally there's a few there that I just want you to stay away from. You've locked the door. Friends, God doesn't want to just forgive your sins.

He wants to kill it. Our surgery, I think, needs to start on the sin of pride because pride is at the heart of all sin. It's, in effect, confidence in ourselves rather than confidence in God and a focus on ourselves rather than a focus on others.

And so if we understand pride, then we understand the nature of sin. And pride is behind the birth of sin in Genesis 3. So pick up your Bibles again. I want you to, page 3, it's pretty simple.

Genesis 3, page 3. And we're going to take a look at this sin. You see, Adam and Eve are being placed in the Garden of Eden by God. Life is perfect.

That is, it's lived perfectly under the obedience of God. It's a life where God knows best because he's God. And frankly, he still knows best because he's God. God says to them that they can eat of any tree in the Garden except this one tree which is in the center of the Garden.

[4 : 42] I think it's a significant point. The tree's in the middle of the Garden of Eden. Adam and Eve, you don't belong in the middle of the universe. You don't belong there at all. It's only God who belongs there. This tree is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, which is why Adam and Eve have no business from eating for this tree.

The idea of the knowledge of good and evil really means that they are the determinants of what is good and what is evil. That is, they become the determinants of what is right and what is wrong. And that is God's job again, not ours. He's the one who sets the agenda. And by eating from the tree, Adam and Eve are really saying that, frankly, God, we want your job. We want your job. And that is exactly what the serpent offers Eve. The serpent casts doubt on God's Word and that he's always the first step to sin. He says to the woman, Eve, did God really say that you must not eat from any tree in the Garden?

This is followed by a denial of God's Word, which is the next step to sin. You will not surely die, the serpent said to the woman. And the final step is decided to make the rules up for themselves, which is the appealing thing to our sinful pride.

[5 : 53] You can be God. For God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you'll be like God. Oh, that's tempting. Knowing good and evil.

The temptation to sin is here. It's not so much to become a lawbreaker, but to become the lawmaker. We become the ruler.

We become the determiners. We make up the rules for ourselves. And so what Adam and Eve do? They eat the tree, the fruit. When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to eye and also desirable for gaining wisdom, they took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband who was with her and he ate it. And so from that point on, they declare themselves to be the ones who make the rules and there is no longer any need for God whatsoever.

And that is what pride is. It's ascending to the place of ruler of the universe. The ruler of my universe even, grasping for God's crown, grasping for his throne, grasping for his power.

[6 : 59] And sin grieves God. But it's not just his law that's broken here, it's his heart that's broken as well. So he measures out his judgment on his rebel creatures, not just the judgment and future destruction that sin brings, but the present destruction as well.

What happens next? What happens next to these so-called now rulers of the universe? They become pretend gods. They become proud rebels. They become self-centered at the core. And you see it as they are accusing each other and eventually killing each other. There is no mercy as we scramble for the controls, trying again and again and again to ascend God's throne and to put ourselves first.

This self-centered pride principle is rampant in all people. It's a sin that is at the core of who we are, where we think about ourselves first, even when those who we love the most are involved in it. I remember when I was 18, I sat on a course of study at the local TAFE college in Narebri, and after six weeks, they gave me an explosive license.

[8 : 14] That was an awesome thing. Six weeks is all it took and I could blow up stuff. And so I got this explosive license and naturally I went out and bought a heap of explosives. And it's a very different day back in those days than what it is now.

And I decided, it happened to coincide when my grandmother came and visited us. And so I decided to show her my newfound wisdom and to blow up something for her. I thought that would impress her.

And so about 300 meters from the house, there was this old dead tree. And I thought, well, that's the target. I'm going to send this baby to the moon. And so I did the calculations.

I worked it all out. Five kilos would be enough to get this tree out of the ground, apparently, according to the calculations. But what would the calculations know? So I decided that I put a few more in, just for old time's sake.

And by the end of... Yeah, have you ever had one of those moments where sort of, you know, logic sort of goes out the door and, you know, something else takes over at the moment? It was one of those moments. And so by the end of it, I had put 15 kilos of explosives under this tree.

[9 : 21] And I thought, this would be good. We will definitely send this in the moon. You can't put it half out of the ground. You want it really. I mean, it's got to be impressive. And so we're there and I lit the fuse, two minute fuse, went back to my grandmother.

And of course, you're calculating it all in your mind about how this should work. And then I realised, just as everything went boom, that 300 metres from the blast site was pretty effective, I think, for five kilos.

But for 15 kilos, we were way too close. And so as this thing started on its mission to Mars, we started to get this noise, which was like, sort of like, as rocks came raining down around us.

And in that moment of panic, when my life was flashing before me, where I knew that potentially I'm about to die here, you know what I did?

My grandmother standing beside me? I ran. I left my grandmother there. And I hived it off into the shed.

[10 : 26] And then, sort of momentary, you know, and you're sort of justifying yourself as you're running. She's had a good life. She's had a long life. I've got, I'm only 18. I've got a lot to live. In that moment where life flashes before you, I thought about me first.

Me first. Of course, I did sort of grab a sheet of iron and hold it over my grandmother eventually, because I thought it would be quite difficult to explain this if she died and I didn't. But it was an impressive explosion.

Let me tell you how much danger we're in. A size of timber, a lump of timber about the size of this lectern here, went over our heads and landed 600 metres passes in the neighbour's paddock. So it travelled 900 metres along the ground, which means technically it went 1.8 kilometres into the air to come down that far.

God was gracious. But at that time, when it's flashing before me, as it does with you, my thought is me. My thought is me.

Just like a compass needle always points north to the needle, the needle of our hearts points to me getting my way first. And friends, this is where Jesus is so much different.

[11 : 38] Jesus brings the great reversal in history. Have a look there. Philippians chapter 2. Flip back in your Bibles to Philippians chapter 2, page 1139. Let me read these verses from Scripture, which are just so cutting us to the core.

Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Your attitude would be the same as that of Christ Jesus, who being in the very nature of God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, that is, something to be used for his own purposes, something that he could gain from, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death, even death on a cross. The answer to sin and pride is found in Jesus.

Adam and Eve grasped for that which is not theirs to take, and Jesus refused to grasp hold of that which was his by right. Where they grasped for God's crown and his throne, Jesus surrenders his.

[12 : 58] Jesus counters their ascent with his descent. He replaces their ladder with his cross.

Instead of proud, grasping hands, grabbing for self, there is humbled, nailed, outstretched hands dying for us.

Total reversal of our future. He takes the penalty for our grasping for his crown and his throne. But Jesus also reverses our present, because not only does he take our death and our judgment, but he gives us new life and a new attitude, a new self, an attitude that is the same as that is Jesus. Jesus climbed down the ladder into humility, rung after rung after rung. He gave up his majesty and his glory, and glory of heaven, and enters our world as a servant.

He doesn't just give up his comfort, he gives up his life, not just dying, but crucified, not just for his friends, but for his enemies.

And so the model that we are to follow is found in verse 7. He made himself nothing. He wasn't pushed. It wasn't an accidental fall.

[14 : 19] Step by deliberate step, Jesus chose this path. The path from the peak of creation to the shame of the cross. He embraced the life of giving, of serving, of losing, of dying.

And our attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus. The attitude reversal we need here is quite simply the difference between up and down.

As dying to pride and rising to humility. In an upwardly mobile world, we follow a downwardly mobile savior.

We are to give up our pathetic attempts at being God. We are to confess that he's at the center and seek to revolve around him. And as we continue to grow and grow and grow as Christians, it means we continue to climb down and down.

And descend into greatness. Dying to pride means that we take up our cross. As Jesus commanded, it means being dead to yourself.

[15 : 26] Our wants, our desires, you become alive to the needs of those around you. You turn from self-centeredness to Christ and other person-centeredness. This is what verses 15 and 16 of Philippians 2 says about how different we are to be as God's people.

So that you may become blameless and pure children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life. Pure amongst the depraved. You see the contrast here. Pure amongst the depraved. Light amongst the darkness. Life in the world of death. And doing what? Holding out the word of life.

Not reaching out to be God, but reaching out with his word instead. Not hands grabbing for me, but hands turned out to you. Open hands.

Hands prepared to get nails in them. Hands just like Jesus. And attitude just like Jesus. It's a pretty huge reversal, isn't it?

[16 : 29] Huge reversal. Because I think if we're honest with ourselves, we would see exactly how far we are from Jesus. And how too much we are like this world.

Same priorities. Same selfishness. Same pride. And so this is pretty drastic surgery. But we actually need it to live.

We actually need it to live. The only thing that this world will teach you about sin is how to do it. The only mention of sin you will find is in things like dessert menus, like wicked chocolate and sinful cake or something like that.

In fact, the actress Kirstie Alley said on an MTV interview some time ago, I don't think pride is a sin. I think some idiot made that up. Or that would be God you're talking about there, Kirstie.

The world thinks it's very different from God when it comes to sin and pride. They think it doesn't matter. God says we need surgery. It matters. It matters enormously. And so how different are we prepared to be here at St. Paul's?

[17 : 38] If there was a Christian convention down at the entertainment center called Humility Fest 2009, would you sign up and go?

Humility Fest 2009, would you go? Would you sign up for seminars? God needs you to wash feet. Or another seminar. Learning to shut up and listen.

Or take off your cross without making a big deal about it. Would you sign up for seminars like that? How different are we prepared to be?

You see, if you've come to Jesus, we cannot be the way we were. Coming first as far as God is concerned isn't about winning the argument.

It's not about shouting the loudest. It's not about having the sharpest mind. It's not about having the funniest wit. It's not about having the truest body. It's not about having the enviable family. It's not about having the prestigious job.

[18 : 38] It's not about the secure investments. Living the Christian life is about forfeiting your rights and descending, descending, descending, descending into humility and the greatness of our Savior.

Being like the God who has saved you. Man, if we were a church like that, what sort of impact would we have? Let me close by praying a prayer for this book called The Valley of Vision. It's a collection of Puritan prayers and devotions. And the very first words, the very first prayer on it is actually the prayer, the Valley of Vision. That's unusual.

The Valley of Vision? Is it not the mountaintops of vision? Let's pray. Lord, high and holy, meek and lowly, you have brought us to this valley of vision where we live in the depths but see you in the heights.

Hending by mountains of sin, we behold your glory. And so, Father, let us learn by paradox that the way down is the way up, that to be low is to be high, that the broken heart is the healed heart, that the contrite spirit is the rejoicing spirit, that the repenting soul is the victorious soul, and to have nothing is to possess all, that to bear the cross is to wear the crown, and to give is to receive, that the valley is the place of vision.

[20 : 17] Lord, in the daytime, stars can be seen from deepest wells, and the deeper the wells, the brighter your star shines. And so let us find your light in darkness, your life in our death, your joy in our sorrow, your grace in our sin, your riches in our poverty, your glory in our valley.

And we ask it for your sake. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.
Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.