

The Challenge of Pride

Living in Unity:

James 3:13-18

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Last Sunday, we talked about how God fits us together to operate in unity, and how he creates this unity through the Holy Spirit. In the Scriptures, we are commanded to:

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit... (Ephesians 4:3, NIV)

We discussed how our tongue gets in the way. In my devotions this week, I read:

With his mouth the godless destroys his neighbor... A man who lacks judgment derides his neighbor, but a man of understanding holds his tongue. (Proverbs 11:9, 11; NIV)

I suggested that we as individuals and a congregation try a tongue-fast. I encouraged us to use this Lenten season to fast from gossip, complaining, deception and negative statements. You know what? I found this past week really tough. A talk with a colleague left me sullen and angry. My tongue was hot with fire. Do you know how in dry spells signs reveal the fire danger? The risk this week, at least for me, was high. I also got some good natured kidding. In one group, an individual teased, "We can't gossip, complain, exaggerate or speak negatively. What are we going to talk about?"

Our speech functions as soul-recognition software. *It's actually Soul-Recognition Speechware.* It reveals the condition of our hearts. If our talk is sensitive and full of gratitude, it shows that the heart is welcoming God's love and full of faith. If our words are complaining and self-absorbed, they unveil a hurting soul. Most often when we are hurting, we feel devalued. We feel we are not taken seriously or loved. It is like there is a hole in our (s-o-u-l) soul.

The other day I had a hole in my (s-o-l-e) sole, and those shoes ended up in the garbage, but our (s-o-u-l) soul is not disposable. It is eternal. We try to fix our souls with pride. **Pride is the self-focused exertion of our value.**

In our worship this morning, we sang:

When I survey the wondrous cross on which the Prince of Glory died, my richest gain I count but loss, and pour contempt on all my pride.

Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast, save in the death of Christ, my God; all the vain things that charm me most, I sacrifice them to his blood.

We also sang:

We will work with each other; we will work side by side. We will work with each other; we will work side by side. And we'll guard each man's dignity and save each man's pride.

So what gives? Are we going to pour contempt on all our pride or save each one's pride?

In the Scriptures and in traditional Christian teaching, Satan was first created as Lucifer, a high-powered, lead angel. His name means light-bearer. It is reasoned if people see the true light, they will be so impressed that they will worship God. Thus, Lucifer served God and creation by drawing God's creation to see and worship him. Lucifer coveted the devotion and value God received. In pride, he exerted his own value independent of God. He did not boast of God's great generosity to him, but of his own value and abilities. Immediately, he became an enemy of God, clouding creation's vision of its sovereign creator. As he exerts his value and

exalts himself, he diverts eyes from God and submerges trust in God. In doing this, he is the father of lies. He is self-deceived, and thus there is no truth in him. With bravado he deceived other angels, and now leads a spirit and human rebellion against God.

We pour contempt on our pride when we reject any value attached to us aside from God's creating and redeeming work in Christ. God knew before he made a single one of us that we would be a bucket of trouble. Nevertheless, he loved and valued us so much as his children, as his companions and as his chiefs that he determined before the creation of the world that he would sacrifice Jesus to redeem us from sin and raise us to purity so that we belong to God as his family. Through sin, we are nothing more than evil doers who act as agents and pawns of Satan's self-validating schemes. Through Christ, our dignity as God's creation is guarded, our true pride as God's own children is saved.

Do you doubt your dignity as God's child rescued with the tears, pain and death of God's one and only righteous son? Do you doubt your value? Do you keep God's words about you and his promises in mind?

Almost every angry word I have uttered has come when I have lost sight of these truths, and have tried to exert my value independent of God. That is why the Bible says:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. (James 3:13-15, NIV)

When we exert our own value, when we envy the lot of another, when we try to create a name for ourselves, we follow the thinking and actions of Lucifer. When we harbor these bitter feelings and thoughts, we're deceived. Our hearts become insensitive to others. We don't hear ourselves complaining. We don't hear ourselves judging. We don't recognize the negativity

pouring out of our mouths. We'll deny our bitter envy and selfish ambition, or we'll boast that we are deserving of what we seek.

I never met Dawson Trotman. He died in a boating accident before I turned one-year-old. However, his writing and then his example, emulated by others, got to me. He understood how insidious pride is. He felt if he wasn't confronted at least once a week, he was probably too prideful to listen. Does anyone have access to your soul to help you see your speech, your actions and your heart? Can you be clueless to your complaining and negativity? Can you be ignorant of the detrimental effects your attitude and actions have on others?

Last year at this time, we were praying and discussing the notion of simultaneous worship services? I thought God was leading us down a path to use both our fellowship hall and our sanctuary for worship in the middle of the morning. I remember the tremendous work put into the proposals. I recall the sacrifices and time spent checking logistics and communicating with many people. I was concerned about how we'd treat each other as we came to a decision. How could I let people express themselves and yet limit hurtful speech? We had felt such a tearing as a church, and I feared more of it. I prayed and called others to pray with me to discern God's will and to seek God's blessing. When the day of decision arrived, I planned for Holy Communion. However, we just read 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter. We read:

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. (1 Corinthians 13:4-10, NIV)

When I read those words “*For we know in part and we prophesy in part,*” God melted my heart. At that very moment I thought, “*I know God led us to propose this, but I can’t tell you what God would have you do. I only know in part.*” At that moment, I felt tremendous freedom. God could do anything he wanted with us, and I wouldn’t take it as repudiation, for I know in part and was obedient. God was pruning my heart from sneaky pride that demands you acknowledge my value and validate my opinion. That night, last May, God did a work in me, so that I will live in unity with you.

The Bible says:

For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness. (James 3:16-18, NIV)

Do you realize that God is addressing our pride today? As we fast from gossip, complaining, deception and negative words, God is exposing Lucifer’s deception in our hearts; God is addressing our pride, our self-focused assertion of our value. God is creating us to be a peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful people united by the work of Christ’s Spirit. In fact, God is investing in us, so that in our unity a crop of righteous behavior blesses our community.