

# Pride, Humility, And The Day Of Atonement

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It may seem early to focus on the Day of Atonement in July, but because four holy days fall in one month's time—and Tabernacles so dominates the season—Atonement frequently gets short shrift. But so important is its meaning to us that God's instruction for observing it carries what some commentators interpret as the death penalty for not observing it properly (Leviticus 23:29)! With its seriousness in mind, I have written this article in the hope that it will prove profitable in helping us prepare for this year's Day of Atonement.

We can hardly think about Atonement without also thinking of fasting. But fasting is not the primary issue in the keeping of Atonement! In fact, in not even one scripture does God directly command us to fast on this day. However, I am not suggesting that we do not need to fast on Atonement; indeed, I definitely believe we *should* fast then. Luke notes in Acts 27:9 that "the Fast was already over," referring to the time of year this event took place. He undoubtedly meant Atonement, but, even so, fasting on this day is only strongly implied rather than directly commanded.

This is an example of the peculiar manner in which the Bible is written: Only rarely is the entire instruction on a subject given in one place. The same can be said of the teaching that this day is a shadow of Satan's removal from authority and binding, derived largely from Leviticus 16 and Revelation 20:1-3. Because the word "Azazel," a pagan name for a demon, appears in Leviticus 16, this implication is a little more evident than is the necessity to fast on Atonement. However, some will argue that Azazel does not refer to Satan at all.

The basic commands and thus the fundamental guidelines from God about observing the Day of Atonement are found in Leviticus 23:27-32:

Also the tenth day of this seventh month shall be the Day of Atonement. It shall be a holy convocation for you; you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire to the LORD. And you shall do no work on that same day, for it is the Day of Atonement for you before the LORD your God. For any person who is not afflicted of soul on that same day, he shall be cut off from his people. And any person who does any work on that same day, that person I will destroy from among his people. You shall do no manner of work; it shall be a statute forever throughout your generations in all your dwellings. It shall be to you a sabbath of solemn rest, and you shall afflict your souls; on the ninth day of the month at evening, from evening to evening, you shall celebrate your sabbath.

The focus in these verses is on the spirit, or attitude in which we keep Atonement. Considering verse 29, doing things right on this day is a serious responsibility. For religious Jews, this is the most solemn day of the year.

## Fasting and Afflicting Our Souls

Three times in this short span of verses God commands us to afflict our souls or be afflicted. Many think that "fast" is derived from the same word as "afflict," but such is not the case. They are not cognate; in the Hebrew they have no etymological connection. They are two different words with

distinctly different roots. God probably uses these different words to emphasize the attitude one should have during a fast, rather than the act itself, because it is entirely possible for a person to fast for a day and not be in the right attitude. However, when done properly, fasting can very greatly enhance the lesson of this holy day.

"Fast" is derived from a word meaning "to cover the mouth," implying that no nourishment gets past it into the body.

"Afflict," *anah*, is an intriguing word, giving us great insight into how God intends us to use this day. According to *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, its primary meaning is "to force or try to force into submission," "to punish or inflict pain upon." When used in contexts involving attitude, it means "to find oneself in a stunted, humble, lowly position; cowed." It is used to describe what one does to an enemy (Numbers 24:24), what Sarah inflicted on Hagar (Genesis 16:6) and what the lawless do to the weak (Exodus 22:22). It is used of the pain inflicted on Joseph's ankles by his chains (Psalm 105:18). Moses describes Egypt's treatment of Israel with this word (Exodus 1:11-12), and in this case, it implies more than the emotional pain of slavery but something that hurt physically. Thus, in *Strong's Concordance*, the author uses such forceful and painful words as "browbeat," "deal hardly with," "defile," "force," "hurt" and "ravish" to describe it. *Anah* is a strong, forceful word.

### **Affliction to Humble Us**

We will take a step closer to understanding the primary focus of Atonement by seeing a few more applications of this word. In Deuteronomy 8:2-3, God records:

And you shall remember that the LORD your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble [*anah*] you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled [*anah*] you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the LORD.

Israel endured many discomforts during those forty years, and they sinned a great deal too. However, God reminds them that He was with them during both good and bad times. He also makes it very clear that He Himself inflicted a great deal of pain on them, and that He did this for three specific reasons: to humble them, to know what was in their hearts and to teach them that man does not live by bread alone.

If He did these things to humble them, then the flip side is that He did it to knock the pride from them. Pride motivated many of their sins. As a recurring theme in Scripture, God's work to humble us is something to keep at the forefront of our minds. The author of Hebrews warns us, "Do not despise the chastening of the Lord" (Hebrews 12:5). He is deeply involved in our lives, and because He loves us dearly, He will correct us painfully when necessary (verse 6).

Deuteronomy 8 teaches that God humbles us to drive the pride of self-sufficiency far from us. When things go well, it is easy to forget God and ascribe success to natural abilities, learned skills or even good luck. But when the body is not fed, it begins to weaken noticeably, and it soon begins to feel

pain. The spirit, though, seems to weaken and "die" so slowly that it is almost imperceptible. As we spiritually deteriorate, we may even feel blessed and prospered by God! So He disciplines us with pain to warn us that all is not as well as our vanity is leading us to think.

Isaiah 64:8-12 is a vivid and colorful example of God inflicting pain for disobedience.

But now, O LORD, You are our Father; we are the clay, and You our potter; and all we are the work of Your hand. Do not be furious, O LORD, nor remember iniquity forever; indeed, please look—we all are Your people! Your holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and beautiful temple, where our fathers praised You, is burned up with fire; and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Will You restrain Yourself because of these things, O LORD? Will You hold Your peace, and afflict [*anah*] us very severely?

Isaiah asks God to restrain Himself lest the punishment exceed what they can bear. Again, the force of this word is plain in the descriptions of the cities, Zion, Jerusalem and the temple. Pain seems to get our attention like nothing else. It may be a last resort, but it is usually very effective.

Zechariah 10:2-3 ought to be interesting in light of what has happened since our former association liberalized the doctrines.

For the idols speak delusion; the diviners envision lies, and tell false dreams; they comfort in vain. Therefore the people wend their way like sheep; they are in trouble [*anah*] because there is no shepherd. My anger is kindled against the shepherds, and I will punish the goatherds. For the LORD of hosts will visit His flock, the house of Judah, and will make them as His royal horse in the battle.

This is speaking specifically of a time yet future, but its principle is that pain comes upon people because there is no shepherd. Both people (sheep) and leaders (goats) receive painful punishment because of their sins.

Psalms 119:71 and 75 put a positive spin on the use of *anah*.

It is good for me that I have been afflicted [*anah*], that I may learn Your statutes. . . . I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted [*anah*] me.

Lamentations 3:31-33 assures us there is loving purpose and compassionate consideration involved in God's affliction. "For the Lord will not cast off forever. Though He causes grief, yet He will show compassion according to the multitude of His mercies. For he does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." This statement almost sounds like "this is going to hurt Me more than it does you." His discipline is always tempered by mercy. If He applied strict justice, He could lawfully kill us all off because that is what we deserve.

### **Self-Inflicted *Anah***

By taking another step in the Bible's use of *anah*, we will arrive right in the Day of Atonement! *Anah* also describes self-inflicted inner pain, expressing sorrow, and it is often accompanied by fasting. This is harder to see in English because the word must be amplified for English to express what the Hebrew does so easily by changing the verb's stem.

Isaiah writes, "Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted [*anah*]" (Isaiah 53:4). When *anah* is used in what is called the *niphal* stem, it means the pain, trouble or discomfort is reflexive and thus **self-inflicted**. In English grammar, "reflexive" means the action of the verb is directed back at the subject. One of the things Isaiah 53:4 is saying, then, is that Christ voluntarily submitted Himself to this affliction.

In most cases in English translations, the interpreters chose to add more words to clarify that the action was self-imposed. Sometimes "fasting" will frequently appear in the same context if it is strongly implied:

In those days I, Daniel, was mourning three full weeks. I ate no pleasant food, no meat or wine came into my mouth, nor did I anoint myself at all, till three whole weeks were fulfilled. . . . Then he said to me, "Do not fear, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand, and to humble [*anah*, chasten—KJV] yourself before your God, your words were heard; and I have come because of your words. (Daniel 10:2-3, 12)

Whether the prophet simply eliminated these specific things from his diet during the period or abstained from food entirely is not relevant here. What is important is that we see that the chastening or humbling was self-imposed.

Psalms 35:13 presents us with a clear example in which *anah* is not in the *niphal* stem, but clarity is achieved by explanation: "But as for me, when they were sick, my clothing was sackcloth; I humbled [*anah*] myself with fasting." In this case the self-imposed affliction or humbling is by means of fasting. Ezra 8:21 is another example: "Then I proclaimed a fast there at the river of Ahava, that we might humble [*anah*] ourselves before our God, to seek from Him the right way for us and our little ones and all our possessions." Again, *anah* is not in the *niphal* stem, but the rest of the verse explains that the humbling comes through fasting.

### **Pride Must Be Removed**

Why does God devote an entire festival—the most solemn day of the year, the very day that foreshadows our being at one with Him—to commanding us to go through an exercise in self-affliction designed to promote humility? He does it to impress forcefully upon our minds—and hopefully our character—that the attitude that has produced all the division and fighting on earth is pride. At the same time, He wants to emphasize that oneness and an end to fighting will never happen until we are humbled, and that the humbling process may cause a great deal of pain.

Ezekiel 28:17 reveals the very beginning of pride: "Your [Satan's] heart was lifted up because of your beauty." The marginal reference reads, "your heart was made proud." In Job 41:34, as part of the description of Leviathan, Satan is called "king over all the children of pride." God describes no mere animal but rather uses an animal as a type of the Devil.

Satan's pride led him into war with God (Isaiah 14:12-14). He has passed this proclivity on to his "children," and their pride in turn leads them to divide from each other and enter into wars against each other as their father does. Pride is a vine that produces a multitude of evil fruits—so many that some call it "the father of all sin." As long as the seed of pride is alive, it has a very good chance of springing forth in ugly conduct.

Sometimes the Bible clearly states what pride produces. At other times, it shows this by associating pride with its fruit. It usually does this immediately within a given verse in which the word "pride" appears by showing pride to be synonymous with its fruit.

For example, Psalm 10:4 says, "The wicked in his proud countenance does not seek God; God is in none of his thoughts." This statement seems to catch the essence of all of pride's fruit. It causes a person to resist God rather than seek to be like Him. How can a person be one with God without seeking Him?

An alternate translation of the last clause in verse 4 is, "All his thoughts are, 'There is no God.'" Pride colors all he thinks concerning morals and ethics. His thoughts are on the greatness of man. Because his thoughts are inclined to glorify man, he does not consider that there might be Someone greater to whom he is responsible.

Verse 2 shows that the proud person takes advantage of those who are weaker: "The wicked in his pride persecutes the poor." In practical terms, it means that in pursuing personal desires, the proud person has no regard for the needs and comforts of others. He "runs over" people. He has no esteem for their interests and happiness, thinking them unworthy even to consider. Such an attitude will never bring people together.

Psalm 59:12 adds another angle. "For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips, let them even be taken in their pride, and for the cursing and lying which they speak." Proud people also possess an unruly tongue that curses, lies and offends. This complements the previous verse in that a proud person may not have the opportunity to "run over" somebody in business, but every proud person can boldly or carelessly run over others with his tongue.

Some people are abrupt, abusive, harsh and overbearing with their tongue. Even though they may not physically attack other people, they leave them emotionally abused. Some complain ceaselessly, spreading a pall of negativism that makes others want to avoid them. Neither harshness nor negativism promotes oneness. We need to study how God says to use the tongue, but the cause of offenses that separate us is almost invariably inconsiderate, self-centered pride producing its divisive fruit through the tongue.

Isaiah 9:8-9 presents an interesting point. "The LORD sent a word against Jacob, and it has fallen on Israel. All the people will know—Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria—who say in pride and arrogance of heart. . . ." Here, Isaiah uses a figure of speech to make pride and its fruit synonymous. Pride is not literally arrogance, but an elevated opinion of oneself. When one is proud, however, arrogance is also present. Therefore, the Bible pulls no punches, telling us that arrogance and pride are synonymous. Where pride is, arrogance will also be found in some degree. Does arrogance promote oneness?

Isaiah 16:6 mentions another synonymous pair: "We have heard of the pride of Moab—he is very proud—of his haughtiness and his pride and his wrath." Pride and wrath are also often present

together, a major reason why pride leads to fighting. The degree of wrath is not the issue, only that it is present. In this context, the wrath of Moab is notable because it is excessive and unjustified (see Amos 2:1).

In Isaiah 28, we can see that God makes a connection between the "crown of pride" (verse 1) and "the drunkards [alcoholics, drug addicts] of Ephraim" (verses 1-4, 7-8). Pride and substance abuse are companions. Pride is at the very foundation of drug addiction because it turns one away from God and godliness to focus on the self. One who is focused on himself will hardly promote oneness. We can probably all relate a story of how alcoholism drove a family apart.

### **Fruits of Pride**

Proverbs 21:4 summarizes this section well, giving a picturesque illustration of pride's ability to bear evil fruit: "A haughty look, a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked are sin." The relationship between pride and sin is easily seen, but none seems to exist between either pride or sin and plowing. However, there is a link. Solomon is saying that just as surely as plowing precedes the produce of the earth, so does pride prepare the way for the produce of sin.

In some Bibles "plowing" may be translated "lamp." In this case, pride is depicted as a lamp that guides or lights the way into sin. In his poem, *The Divine Comedy*, Dante Alighieri listed pride among the seven great sins. In fact, he lists it first because, he concludes, it is the father of the others. Because of what the Bible reveals of Satan and his rebellion, he is probably correct.

Obadiah 3 reveals why these fruits are produced and why pride is so dangerous: "The pride of your heart has deceived you, you who dwell in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high; you who say in your heart, 'Who will bring me down to the ground?'" In short, pride deceives one into believing and eventually doing wrongly. What does it deceive a person into believing?

In this context God quotes Edom as saying, "Who will bring me down to the ground?" Edom dwelt in the mountainous country southeast of Judea, and Petra was their stronghold. They thought their combination of military strength and impregnable position made them impossible to defeat. Yet notice what verse 4 adds: "'Though you exalt yourself as high as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, from there I will bring you down,' says the LORD."

What had pride done? It had deceived them into believing they were secure, self-sufficient, quick-witted, intelligent and strong enough to withstand anybody. This clearly illustrates that pride's power lies in its ability to deceive us into believing in our self-sufficiency. Even in our everyday relationships with other people this is a serious deception, but when the deception involves our relationship with God, the level of seriousness reaches alarming proportions.

Notice Zophar's comments on the serious state of the proud in relation to God in Job 20:4-9:

Do you not know this of old, since man was placed on earth, that the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment? Though his haughtiness mounts up to the heavens, and his head reaches to the clouds, yet he will perish forever like his own refuse; those who have seen him will say, "Where is he?" He will fly away like a dream, and not be found; yes, he will be chased away like a vision of the night. The eye that saw him will see him no more, nor will his place behold him anymore.

Proverbs 11:2 clarifies further, "When pride comes, then comes shame; but with the humble is wisdom." Thus, we can understand that the proud hypocrite deceives himself into ignoring realities in the conduct of his life that the meek and humble person quickly recognizes and takes into account. The proud person's vanity pushes him into conduct that will end in shame. The humble person's attitude, on the other hand, is a vivid contrast, for his wisdom prevents him from pursuing the same conduct. This in turn produces even more wisdom when good fruit is produced because it reinforces his right decision.

### **Pride Puffs Up**

This pride seen in Proverbs 11:2 literally means "boiling up," or we might say, "puffed up." It can mean "to overstep the boundaries." The proud person has an inflated opinion of himself and/or his possessions, abilities, powers and accomplishments. This exists because pride has deceived him about his importance. He is the center of the world! The day is coming soon when everyone's proud ego will be deflated, and man's haughty self-regard will be stripped away.

This is exactly what happened to Satan. He got so full of himself that his pride tricked him into believing he could defeat His Creator in battle and take His place! He ignored the reality that he was the creation of God, and that God was thus superior to His creation in every way. His pride deceived him into underestimating the awesome power of God that he had seen demonstrated in the creation! It made him disregard the limited nature of his own power in comparison, making him think he was stronger than was true. It actually made him think he could be God!

This attitude is also at the foundation of Laodiceanism. Of what does God accuse the Laodiceans? "[Y]ou say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'" (Revelation 3:17). Their pride deceives them into believing they are self-sufficient. They have it all! They do not need anything! We should consider that in all probability the Laodicean does not say any such thing with his tongue. In fact, he is probably able to "talk the talk" very well and hypocritically put on a good show of righteousness. But God looks on the heart, seeing not only his *public* conduct but also his motivations and *private* conduct. The Laodicean is of the class that professes to know God but denies Him in works. God's judgment—the correct judgment—is that they are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind and naked."

### **Self-Delusion**

We understand that pride is generated by Satan, "the prince of the power of the air" (Ephesians 2:2). "The god of this world" (II Corinthians 4:4, KJV) finds fertile ground in a particular part of our psyche that the Bible clearly pinpoints. It is an area critical to God's purpose and to whether we will ever be able to live at one with God and others.

Jesus' teaching in Luke 18:9 relates to this: "Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others." This specific problem is religious egotism; the Pharisee despised others. *Despised* means "to count as nothing" or "to be contemptuous of." Can one have a good relationship with someone he despises? Pride finds fertile ground in our process of evaluation and begins to produce corrupt fruit.

This parable reveals the Pharisee to possess a misguided confidence that caused him to magnify himself by comparing himself against someone he felt to be inferior. It fed his own opinion of himself, causing separation from his fellow man. While that was happening, it also brought him into

war with God! The Pharisee became separated from God because, as the parable says, he was not justified.

*We need to take warning because, if we begin to feel contaminated in the presence of a brother—if we begin to withdraw from him or are constantly finding fault with him and being offended by almost everything he does—we may well be in very great trouble! The sin of pride may be producing its evil fruit, and the division is strong evidence of it.*

This parable features a self-applauding lawkeeper and an abased publican. One is not simply good and the other evil; both are equally sinners but in different areas. Both had sinned, but the outward form of their sins differed. Paul taught Timothy that some men's sins precede them and others follow later (I Timothy 5:24). The publican's sins were obvious, the Pharisee's generally better hidden.

The Pharisee's pride deluded him into thinking he had a righteousness he did not really possess. His prayer is full of self-congratulation, and like a circle, it keeps him firmly at its center (notice all the *I*'s in Luke 18:11-12). He makes no lowly expression of obligation to God, he voices no thanksgiving for what God had given him, he gives no praise to God's glory. He asks for nothing, confesses nothing and receives nothing! But very pronouncedly, he compares himself with others. He is filled with conceit and is totally unaware of it because his pride has deceived him into concentrating his judgment on the publicans—sinners who were contaminating his world!

The humble publican did not delude himself into thinking he was righteous. What made the difference? It was a true evaluation and recognition of the self in relation to God, not other men. The basis of their evaluations—pride or humility—made a startling difference in their conclusions, revealing each man's attitudes about himself and his motivations.

The one finds himself only good, the other only lacking. One flatters himself, full of self-commendation. The other seeks mercy, full of self-condemnation. Their approach and attitude toward God and self are poles apart! One stands apart because he is not the kind of man to mingle with inferiors. The other stands apart because he considers himself unworthy to associate himself with others. One haughtily lifts his eyes to heaven; the other will not even look up! How different their spirits! Anyone who, like the Pharisee, thinks he can supply anything of great worth to the salvation process is deluding himself!

Remember the Edomites of Obadiah 3-4? They looked at their stronghold and then at themselves and their enemies. They concluded they were stronger than all—they were impregnable! Their evaluation was in error because they left God out of the picture even as the Pharisee did.

Therein lies much of the problem concerning pride. Against whom do we evaluate ourselves? Pride usually chooses to evaluate the self against those considered inferior. It must do this so as not to lose its sense of worth. To preserve itself, it will search until it finds a flaw.

If it chooses to evaluate the self against a superior, its own quality diminishes because the result of the evaluation changes markedly. In such a case, pride will often drive the person to compete against—and attempt to defeat—the superior one to preserve his status (Proverbs 13:10). Pride's power is in deceit, and the ground it plows to produce evil is in faulty evaluation.

## **Humility the Key**



Psychologists tell us these days that we must have self-esteem, self-assurance and self-respect, and indeed, some measure of these is good. However, unchecked, they easily become arrogance, insolence, presumption, egotism and other forms of self-importance, and in turn, they produce idolatry, hatred, murder, adultery, lying, etc.

On the Day of Atonement God commands us to afflict ourselves. Fasting is the external means God gives to assist us in this. It inflicts upon us a small amount of discomfort, which is a good indicator of God's mercy. He could have commanded us to do something very painful, requiring a great deal of endurance and discipline. He has every right to do so, but instead He chose something that also shows us how much we need what He so generously supplies, such as food and water. Without what He supplies spiritually, we would not last very long in that realm either.

God says through Isaiah:

Thus says the LORD: "Heaven is My throne, and earth is My footstool. Where is the house that you will build Me? And where is the place of My rest? For all these things My hand has made, and all those things exist," says the LORD. "But on this one will I look: on him who is poor and of a contrite spirit, and who trembles at My word." (Isaiah 66:1-2)

Humility is the key to oneness with God. Consequently, it is also the key to oneness with our brethren. God's way of achieving oneness is for each person to be so attuned to God that he is motivated to do everything possible to ensure that the relationship (with God or fellow man) is not only unbroken, but constantly becoming ever closer. We should do this because we are striving to become like Him, and that is how He is.

Each person is responsible for cleaning up his character and humbling himself before God. Each is **not** responsible for judging his brother so critically it drives a wedge between them and separates them. Such a person does not even see his own sin! In such a case, he could not be in God's Kingdom because that manner of thinking would continue right on into it, and God will not allow it there.

In a context that most commentators believe involves the Day of Atonement, Isaiah 58:5-6 directly connects fasting and afflicting the self:

Is it a fast that I have chosen, a day for a man to afflict his soul? Is it to bow down his head like a bulrush, and to spread out sackcloth and ashes? Would you call this a fast, and an acceptable day to the LORD? Is this not the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that you break every yoke?

The Day of Atonement is a time of fasting in conjunction with searching out our sins and repenting of them so we might be one with God and fellow man. On this day especially, we should pursue very few of our normal daily responsibilities. Thus, as we feel the hunger and thirst pangs rise within us, we should have the time to study God's Word and meditate upon our lives. God's Word, meditation and our body's cries to be fed should work to focus our attention on our insufficiency when denied the generous and life-giving blessings of God.

Without what God supplies, we would have no life in the first place, and now that we have life, it cannot be sustained without His continued providence. Honestly facing our need should drive us to

humility and humble submission in prayer. God is the *only* One who can supply what we truly desire and need in order to fulfill His purpose and our hope. Jesus' prayer was that we be one with the Father even as He was one with Him (John 17:20-23). Humility is a major route to that end.