

Pride, Humility, And Fasting

Why We Fast on Atonement

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I am going to begin this sermon with a scripture that I used in my last sermon.

Psalm 10:4 The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

My sermon on the Feast of Trumpets was on reality, and that God's Word *is* reality in contrast to all of the unrealistic things that are constantly bombarding us in this world. God's Word, even prophecy, is more authentic, more genuine, more valid than all of the eyewitness reports that a human being can give. Today we are going to touch on a reality concerning the Day of Atonement and its meaning in terms of the practical everyday application of Christian responsibilities.

Psalm 10:4 made a deep impression on me as I was delivering the sermon on Trumpets. It is *pride* that hinders us from seeking God. For those of us who are already called, the seeking is not to *find* God, because He has already revealed Himself to us. The seeking urged upon us is to be *like* Him. This seeking requires day-to-day application of what is already revealed. In Psalm 10:4 we find that pride stands in the way.

In Acts 27:9 Luke mentioned "the fast." That of course is the Day of Atonement. However, most of us are probably unaware that fasting is *not* directly commanded for the Day of Atonement. I am not saying that I disagree with that—the fact that we do fast. I indeed believe that we definitely should fast. Fasting on the Day of Atonement is something that is arrived at by implication. The implication is a peculiarity of the way the scripture is written: "Here a little, there a little." The whole picture is rarely given in any one place.

Let us go to Leviticus 23 and look at the command and the fundamental guidelines as to why we are to keep this day.

Leviticus 23:26-32 And the Lord spake unto Moses, saying, Also on the tenth day of this seventh month there shall be a day of atonement: it shall be an holy convocation into you: and you shall afflict your souls, and offer an offering made by fire unto the Lord. And you shall do no work in that same day: for it is a day of atonement, to make an atonement for you before the Lord your God. For whatsoever soul it be that shall not be afflicted in that same day, he shall be cut off from among his people. And whatsoever soul it be that does any work in that same day, the same soul will I 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 unto you a sabbath of rest, and you shall afflict your souls: in the ninth day of the month at even, from even unto even, shall you celebrate your sabbath.

Three times in that short span of verses God commands us to afflict our souls, or be afflicted. The word "fast" or "fasting" does not appear there. If we do not afflict our souls we are to be cut off from among our people, and God goes so far as to say, "I will destroy you." Therefore, being afflicted is quite a serious responsibility. So serious is it the Jews consider this day to be the most solemn of the year.

The focus of God's instruction here is on the *spirit* in which the day is to be observed. You might think that fasting is derived from the same word as "afflict," but it is not. They are not cognate. There is no direct connection between the two words. They are two distinctly different words from different roots.

The word "fast" is derived from a word meaning *to cover the mouth*. I feel certain that because God used the word "afflict" He is emphasizing the attitude, the spirit of the day rather than the act of fasting, because it is entirely possible for one to fast a day and not be afflicted spiritually.

The word "afflict" comes from the Hebrew *anah*. Transliterated into English it is *awnah*. This is an intriguing word, and it gives us insight into God's intention for our use of this day. Its primary meaning according to *The Theological Word Book of the Old Testament* is, "to force, or try to force into submission, or to punish or afflict pain upon, or to find one's self in a stunted, humble, lowly position." A modern English synonym is *cowed*. It is used as of what one does to his enemy.

I will give you some examples.

Genesis 16:6 But Abram said unto Sarai, Behold, your maid is in your hand; do to her as it pleases you. And when Sarai dealt *hardly* [*anah*] with her, she fled from her face.

Undoubtedly Hagar looked upon this as persecution. Let us think about this. God uses this same word in regard to the Day of Atonement.

Exodus 22:22 You shall not afflict any widow, or fatherless child.

You do not treat them hard. You do not treat them meanly. You do not make them cowed. You do not inflict pain upon a widow, or I'll tell you, God is going to get after you, because He appointed Himself as their protector.

Exodus 1:11-12 Therefore they did set over them taskmasters to *afflict* them with their burdens. And they built for Pharaoh treasure cities, Pithom and Raamses. But the more they *afflicted* them, the more they multiplied and grew. And they were grieved because of the children of Israel.

Psalms 105:17-18 He sent a man before them, even Joseph, who was sold for a servant: Whose feet they *hurt* [*anah*] with fetters: he was laid in iron.

The last two references—the one in Exodus 1, combined with this one in Psalm 105—imply something more than emotional pain, such as slavery or being in jail, but something that *physically* hurt, as well as psychologically.

If you look in *Strong's Concordance* at #6031, you will find him using such forceful and painful words to describe it as "browbeat," "deal hardly with," "defile," "force," and "ravish," among others. It is a *strong* word that will sometimes be translated into forms of "humble."

Let us go now to Deuteronomy 8, and we are going to look at very familiar verses.

Deuteronomy 8:2-3 And you shall remember all the way which the Lord your God led you these forty years in the wilderness, to *humble* you, and to prove you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or no. And he *humbled* you, and suffered you to hunger, and fed you with manna, which you knew not, neither did your fathers know; that he might make you know that man does not live by bread only, but by every word that proceeds out of the mouth of the Lord does man live.

Anah is used one time in each verse here. Israel went through a great deal of discomfort *directly from God's hand* during those forty years. It is good to take note of this, because sometimes, brethren, we allow ourselves to get into the attitude that somehow God owes us a continuous succession of good times. That is a wrong conception. It is *pride* standing in the way, blocking our progress. We must remember that He is first and foremost a Creator, reproducing Himself, and He will do what is necessary to attain His purpose for us. Besides that, He bought and paid for us through the blood of Christ, and we *gave* Him that right by accepting Christ's blood.

Regarding the Israelites, sometimes the pain and discomfort was inflicted on them because they sinned. But God is also clearly saying that He inflicted pain too in order to humble them. He deliberately did this as part of His creative acts in order to knock the pride from them, because the pride was a major taproot motivating their sin.

This is a recurring theme in scripture. It is something to tuck away in our mind for frequent reference, because we are not to despise the chastenings of the Lord. We must know, and know that we know, that He is deeply involved in our lives and that He loves us very dearly. Anybody who creates

anything knows that some measure of pain is involved in creation. In our case He wants to drive the pride of self-sufficiency from us, because He only knows exactly where He is headed with us.

Here is a fact that you will attest to, that when the body is not fed, it is in pain. It weakens quickly and it would die quickly as well. But what about spirit? Attitude is spirit. In this case, pride stands in the way, blocking us from God. It weakens and dies *slowly* so that one may not even notice the damage it is doing to God's purpose through motivating other bad attitudes and actions. So as God shows with the Israelites, He takes a direct hand, disciplining us with pain to make us aware of it and to deal with the problem.

We are going to go to the book of Isaiah. We will be in this book quite a number of times today, because Isaiah seemed to know a thing or two about suffering pain and humility, and so forth. We are going to read a prayer that Isaiah made.

Isaiah 64:8 But now, O Lord, you are our father; we are the clay, and you our potter; and we all are the work of your hand.

If clay were suddenly personified, what do you think it would do under the pressure of the sculptor's hand as he formed and shaped something? Would the clay say "Ay! Ooh! Ah! Oh!""? It probably would! Well, Isaiah mentions we are the clay, and when God humbles us, while He is shaping us, there is pain involved. He knows where He is going with us, and it is no wonder there is pain involved in what He is doing because we do not shape easily. All through the book He calls us "hard" and "stubborn."

Isaiah 64:9-12 Be not wroth very sore, O Lord, neither remember iniquity forever: behold, see, we beseech you, we are all your people. The holy cities are a wilderness, Zion is a wilderness, Jerusalem a desolation. Our holy and our beautiful house where our fathers praised you, is burned up with fire: and all our pleasant things are laid waste. Will you refrain yourself for these things, O Lord? Will you hold your peace and *afflict* [*anah*] us very sore?

This is a vivid and colorful example of God-inflicted pain for disobedience. You could imagine the pain that was caused when He made Jerusalem a wilderness, and so Isaiah is asking God to restrain Himself, lest the punishment can become greater than can be borne.

Again you can see the force of this word *anah* and it teaches us that pain gets our attention like nothing else. It may be a last resort, but it always seems to work. Pain breaks a man's pride, because it makes him aware of his weakness and his need for help. When we are in pain we cry out for help, and when we cry out for help we are admitting that we are too weak to extricate ourselves from this difficulty.

There is a positive side shown in God's word as well for *anah*—the afflicting of pain.

Psalm 119:71-72 It is good for me that I have been *afflicted*; that I might learn your statutes. The law of your mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver.

We can begin to learn something from this, and that is that God inflicting pain occurs not merely because we sin. In other words, pain does not always mean that we are being punished. It can also mean that we are being shaped. The pain may occur because we are being formed, prepared for what lies ahead. We cannot be in God's Kingdom unless we are changed, living by faith, and becoming *like* Him. He is faithful to use pain to turn us into what we are to become; otherwise, we will never be like Him. There is a similarity with going to school. School may seem hard, but there is a good purpose driving the teacher's difficult assignments, and thus it is with God.

At this point we are going to make a little bit of a turn, another step into the Bible's use of this word. This one will lead us directly into the Day of Atonement. We were looking at *God*-inflicted pain, but the Bible also shows *self*-inflicted pain. This is what the Day of Atonement is about. It is about self-inflicted pain (especially inner pain), expressing sorrow, and often accompanied by fasting.

Now "self-inflicted" pain is not always seen in English when one is studying or reading the Bible. This is because the word *anah* must be amplified during translation in order for the English to express what the Hebrew language easily does by changing what grammaticists call the verb stem. I am going to show you a place where this occurs. Again it is in the book of Isaiah. Chapter 53 ought to trigger a thought in your mind.

Isaiah 53:4 Surely he [Christ] has borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and *afflicted*.

There again is the word *anah*. In English it appears no different from any other time that we might see the word *anah* translated into the English word "afflicted." However, in Hebrew it is written in the niph'al stem, which makes the usage of *anah* reflexive. (We are getting a bit of a grammar lesson here.) In English grammar that means that the action is directed back at the subject. In short then, what Isaiah 53:4 is telling us is that Jesus *voluntarily* submitted to the affliction, which in turn perfectly agrees with John 10:17-18 where Jesus stated that "He lays down His life for the sheep. No man takes it from Him."

We can understand then that Jesus could have run away and avoided the pain, if we want to look at it like that. There might have been some other way to go about it and to leave this behind and not have to suffer that. But instead, He volunteered. Is it not interesting that God, in a sense, left it up to Him as to what He was going to do? And so Jesus, setting the example, inflicted the pain on Himself, as it were, by submitting to what He could perceive the Father wanted. You know that He went through a struggle. Three times He prayed to God that if there were some other way that He would not have to go through this, to show it Him. But God was silent, and He could see that it was God's will, and so He then submitted Himself to the crucifixion and the beating that went with it.

Let us now look at Psalm 35:13. David wrote this psalm.

Psalm 35:13 But as for me, when they [his enemies] were sick, my clothing was sackcloth [meaning that he was fasting]: I humbled

my soul with fasting; and my prayer returned into my own bosom.
[In other words, it was answered.]

In this case, when David wrote this psalm, he did not use *anah* in the niph'al sense. Instead, he spelled everything out. He could have taken the shortcut and just used it in the niph'al sense, but he did not. He spelled everything out by using more words. In this example, the affliction—the humbling, the fasting—was self-imposed. Nobody commanded him to do it. He took it upon himself to pray for his enemies. He went one step further and fasted as well for their well-being.

We will look at another one in Ezra 8:21. Ezra did the same thing that David did. I do not mean in fasting for his enemies. In this case he was not fasting for his enemies, but when it was written, he used *anah*. He put other words in to make the point very clear.

Ezra 8:21 Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance.

Now we are going to go to Isaiah 58:10. In this case *anah* is in the niph'al tense.

Isaiah 58:10 And if you draw out your soul to the hungry, and satisfy the afflicted soul; then shall your light rise in obscurity, and your darkness be as the noon day.

He does not say there that he afflicted himself with fasting, but we know that it was self-imposed. This is something that God desires of us, in that we think enough of others to even pray for them.

This one verse here *may* give the implication, (I say "*may*." It is not real strong, but the possibility is there.) that the entire chapter on fasting should be seen from the niph'al-stem point of view, and this would also tie it into the Day of Atonement.

Why does God devote an entire festival—the most solemn day of the year, and the very day that foreshadows being at one with Him—commanding us

to go through an exercise in self-affliction, designed to promote humility? I am going to give you the answer to that briefly. The reasons are two-fold. In one sense, they are opposite sides of the same coin.

The lesson is for us to make a connection between what has *caused* the separation that keeps us from being at one with Him, and at the same time to vividly understand what is going to pave the way for the separation to be healed.

Very briefly, pride caused the separation. Humility—being poor in spirit—is its solution. And so in fasting—inflicting upon one's self a discipline that brings pain—a sacrifice is made to humble us and pave the way for at-onement with God.

Now we are going to start sort of another section of this sermon in Ezekiel 28:17. The subject here is Satan, and it says:

Ezekiel 28:17 Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty: you have corrupted your wisdom by reason of your brightness: I will cast you to the ground. I will lay you before kings that they may behold you.

The first phrase in that verse is the key one here for this sermon. "Your heart was lifted up." Here we find the beginning of pride. This pride that is flowing from him is pretty serious business. In Job 41:34 is an interesting statement. In this chapter Leviathan is being described. Leviathan is undoubtedly an animal, but when we get to this verse we know for sure that God is not really talking about an animal. Yes, the animal is an example, but the one He is talking about is Satan the Devil, and this verse says:

Job 41:34 He beholds all high things: he is a king over all the children of pride.

Symbolically, Leviathan represents Satan. Animals are not proud. Animals act according to the patterns that are established by God in their brain. They can only act and react according to those things, and pride is not part of what they are equipped to feel and exhibit. But Satan was different. He is the king of pride. We know that he is the one who generates pride in human beings.

It is what pride promotes in the way of conduct that is damaging. It is its fruit that causes multitudes of problems. These problems will never be eradicated until pride is eradicated, because as long as the seed of pride is alive there is a very good chance that it is going to spring forth in ugly relationship-damaging conduct.

In Ezekiel 28 we read that pride motivated Satan, moving him to talk against God, thus gaining sympathizers for his point of view that God is unfair. When he felt ready, he made war against the Almighty. That is hardly designed to make friends, and be at one with your Creator.

Now let us look at some specific notations of what pride produces. While we are doing this I hope that you will be examining yourself closely. I do not think that anybody is going to get caught in all of them, but almost everybody is going to get caught in one or some of them. We are going to go back to Psalm 10, the verse with which we began.

Sometimes the Bible clearly states what pride produces, and at other times the Bible shows what it produces by associating pride with its fruit. The verse will usually do this *immediately* within the given verse in which the word pride appears, thus showing that pride itself is synonymous with what it produces.

Psalm 10:4 The wicked, through the pride of his countenance, will not seek after God: God is not in all his thoughts.

Pride resists God rather than seeking Him. This raises the question. How can one be with God without seeking Him? It is an impossibility. What this does is lay bare the central issue here.

An alternative translation of that last phrase is: "All his thoughts are that there is no God." This is really interesting within the context, because what does a person who is not mindful of God think about? What *can* he think about? He can only think about himself, and, we will say, those who are close to him, or we will say those important to him—those he can see that are part of his family. But they are not God. He can see who they are and what they do. He looks around him and all that has been accomplished. His

proud thoughts are of the greatness of man, because man has done all of this. God did not do it. Man did it, see?

It is right here that we meet why God has such a strong issue with pride, because pride generates self-sufficiency. That is the issue. We will show how it does this. Pride generates self-sufficiency, and self-sufficient people will not seek after what they do not think they need and do not want. They are all right the way they are. Pride blinds people to their need. Of course that is not realistic either.

To those who fit the description that man is so great, considering all of his vaunted achievements, there is room for none greater, because that person cannot *see* anything greater.

Psalm 10:2 The wicked in his pride does persecute the poor: let them be taken in the devices that they have imagined.

The proud take advantage of those they perceive as weaker, and it means that in the pursuit of personal desires he has no regard for the interests and needs of others, including God. Humanly, what happens is that the proud *use* people in a selfish way. They run over people, as we would say today, because they have no esteem at all for other peoples' interests and happiness, and think of them as unworthy even to be considered. That is hardly designed to bring people together with God, or with other people.

We go on. It gets more interesting. This next one is kind of a bombshell.

Psalm 59:12 For the sin of their mouth and the words of their lips let them even be taken in their pride: and for cursing and lying which they speak.

Proud people possess an unruly tongue that curses and lies. This complements the previous verse in that proud people may not have the opportunity to "run over" or use others in business. But every proud person who speaks has the opportunity to run over people with his tongue, and thus destroy reputations, or to gossip.

Some people are abrupt, abusive, harsh, or overbearing with their tongue. Even though they may not physically attack and punch the other person out, they leave them emotionally abused. Brethren, I think that in the church we have more people offended by the tongue than maybe by all other means combined. This cause of offense is almost invariably inconsiderate self-centered pride, producing division through the tongue.

James 3:2-6 For in many things we offend all. If any man offend not in word, this same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us; and we turn about their whole body. Behold also the ships which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor lists [or wants to go]. Even so [in like manner], the tongue is a little member, and boasts great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindles! And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defiles the whole body, and sets on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell.

You know now, from Psalm 59, which we just read, that at the foundation of a foul mouth and a lying abusive tongue is pride, which is generating it.

Isaiah 9:9-10 And all the people shall know, even Ephraim and the inhabitant of Samaria, that say in the pride and stoutness of heart, the bricks are fallen down, but we will build with hewn stones: the sycamores are cut down, but we will change them into cedars.

This is a very early version of, "Do not worry. We are going to hit a homerun in the last half of the ninth inning." "We will do the best we can with whatever we have, and we will rise above this destruction."

It is interesting that the word "stoutness" that appears here is mostly translated "arrogance," or sometimes "stubbornness of heart." This is one of those places where a figure of speech is used to make pride and its fruit, arrogance, synonymous. Pride is not *literally* arrogance, or stoutness of heart. Pride is an elevated opinion of one's self, but when one is proud, arrogance almost invariably appears.

Isaiah 16:6 We have heard of the pride of Moab: he is very proud: even of his haughtiness, and his pride, and his wrath: but his lies shall not be so [that is, as he determines].

Here is another synonymous application. Pride, wrath, and lies go hand-in-hand. The degree expressed is not the issue in this context. The wrath is mentioned because, in relation to Moab, it is notably excessive, unjustified, and, as God points out, driven by pride.

I think you are going to find this next one interesting. I would bet nobody ever thought of this.

Isaiah 28:1-4 Woe to the crown of pride, to the drunkards of Ephraim, whose glorious beauty is a fading flower, which are on the head of the fat valleys of them that are overcome with wine! Behold, the Lord has a mighty and strong one, which as a tempest of hail and a destroying storm, as a flood of mighty waters overflowing, shall cast down to the earth with the hand. [That turned out to be Assyria.] The crown of pride, the drunkards of Ephraim shall be trodden under feet: And the glorious beauty, which is on the head of the fat valley shall be a fading flower, and as the hasty fruit before the summer: which when he that looks upon it, sees, while it is yet in his hand he eats it up.

Isaiah 28:7-8 But they also have erred through wine, and through strong drink, are out of the way: the priest and the prophet have erred through strong drink, they are swallowed up of wine, they are out of the way through strong drink: they err in vision, they stumble in judgment. For all tables are full of vomit and filthiness so that there is no place clean.

Did you pick it up there? Pride is at the very foundation of alcoholism, or we might say drug addiction, to make it more encompassing.

Now we are going to turn to a really dangerous fruit of pride. Pride is on the scene in Nebuchadnezzar's life.

Daniel 5:20 But when his heart was lifted up, and his mind hardened in pride, he was deposed from his kingly throne, and they took his glory from him.

Pride precedes the fall. "Hardness of heart." Pride makes a person hard, whether against God, or people. Rather than being tenderhearted, kind, and forgiving, and sensitive to God and man, childlike and easily appealed to, the person becomes uncooperative and resistant, and insistent that his one way is the only way. Nebuchadnezzar paid a bitter price, living seven years as an animal. God apparently left just enough mind in him that he could repent, but it still took him seven years.

I have chosen this next verse to kind of sum up this section.

Proverbs 21:4 An high look and a proud heart, and the plowing of the wicked, is sin.

I do not know whether you saw it here that God said that pride all by itself is a sin. That is what He says. "A high look and a proud heart is sin." It is just like the plowing of the wicked. In this verse there is more. Pride is paralleled with plowing and sin. At first glance it may seem as though there might be a relationship between pride and sin, but between pride and plowing? How are they comparable? Well there is a relationship between the two.

This verse is saying that just as surely as plowing precedes and prepares for the productions of the earth, so does pride prepare for the production of sin. It is at the base of almost every sin. In some Bibles the word "plowing" may be translated "lamp," but it has the same sense, meaning, "That which guides or lights the way into sin is pride."

Dante Alighieri, the author of *The Divine Comedy*, listed pride *first* among the seven great sins, because he concluded, and probably rightly so because of what the Bible reveals about the Satan/pride relationship, that pride is the father of all sin.

Now we are going to see why pride produces sin.

Obadiah 3-4 The pride of your heart has *deceived* you, you that dwells in the clefts of the rock, whose habitation is high: that says in his heart, Who shall bring *me* down to the ground? Though you exalt yourself as the eagle, and though you set your nest among the stars, thence will *I* bring you down, says the Lord.

Here we find a simple statement to help us understand how pride plows the way to sin. Pride deceives one into believing *wrongly*, and thus *doing* wrongly. Now into what does pride deceive? The context here clearly shows Edom is quoted by God as saying, "Who will bring *me* down to the ground?"

Edom dwelt in the mountainous territory south of Judea where Petra was its stronghold. They thought that the combination of their military strength and impregnable position made them impossible to defeat. You might notice that verse 4 adds a bit of the answer actually to this picture.

What had pride done? It had deceived them into believing that they were secure, self-sufficient, quick-witted, intelligent, and *strong* enough within themselves to stand. You see, therein lies pride's power—the power to deceive one into thinking that one's position is unassailable, absolutely right, and self-sufficient.

Zophar, who was arguing away with Job, came up with a pretty insightful observation.

Job 20:4-7 Know you not this of old, since man was placed upon earth. That the triumphing of the wicked is short, and the joy of the hypocrite but for a moment? Though his excellency mount up to the heavens, and his head reach unto the clouds; Yet he shall perish forever like his own dung: they which have seen him shall say, Where is he?

Zophar connects wickedness with hypocrisy, and then connects both of them with pride. Now where does pride appear here? It is in the word *excellency*—"through their own self-perceived excellency." Many modern translations translate that word "excellency" into "haughtiness." They see what Zophar intended.

The hypocrite is deceived into ignoring realities the meek and humble person might quickly recognize. A deceived person does not know that he is deceived, or he would not be deceived. Pride is so powerful that it can deceive very intelligent people. It is not a matter of intelligence. It is a matter of the right kind of knowledge and the willingness to submit to it.

Proverbs 11:2 When pride comes, then comes shame: but with the lowly [the humble] is wisdom.

You see, the vanity of the proud pushes him into conduct that will end in shame or disgrace, because when the sin comes you know for sure that shame and disgrace are on their way. The vanity of the proud, in thinking so much about himself, that he really is something, pushes him into conduct that will end in shame or disgrace. The proud strongly tend to ignore certain realities, as I showed in my Trumpets sermon.

The humble, on the other hand, is a vivid contrast to the haughty hypocrite in that *his* wisdom prevents him from following that destructive path, thus producing even more wisdom because the fruit of his right choice reinforces that right choice.

It is interesting, the phrase, "when pride comes" is actually a word that in the Hebrew literally means "boiling up." That is what pride is. It is a "boiling up" of a person's vanity. God is saying that the proud have their egos inflated. Now why does this occur? It is because their pride has deceived them. This is exactly what happened to Satan. He is the prime example. It is so clear, that if we look at him, we can see what pride does to us.

Satan got so full of himself that his pride deceived him into thinking he could defeat God in a war, and take God's place. Now if that is not the epitome of vanity, I do not know what is. Satan was completely deceived by pride, and so he ignored the reality that he was a creation of God, and therefore that God was superior in every way to that which He had made. Satan's pride was able to deceive him into ignoring the awesome power of God demonstrated in the creation, and it made him ignore the smallest of his own power in comparison, and made him think it was far greater than the reality. It actually made him think he could be God.

Are you aware that this is the foundation of Laodiceanism? What does God say in His accusation of them? "I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing." **"I am okay, God. Who needs You?" "The greatest thing I can see is *me*!"** It is just like Psalm 10:4, and it happens right in God's church. Their pride deceives them into thinking they are self-sufficient, that they have it all. What is so interesting is that the Laodicean will, in all probability, not say any such thing with his tongue. In fact he will probably be able to "talk the talk" very well, and hypocritically put on a good show.

But you see, God looks upon the heart and He sees all of their conduct and attitudes all the time. They are of the class who profess to know God, but in works deny Him. God's judgment of them is that they are "wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked." They are blind to what they are, and they are naked, meaning they are not clothed with righteousness. That is ***one serious sin*** , and pride is generating it.

Luke 18:9-14 And he spake this parable unto certain which trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: Two men went up into the temple to pray: the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, God, I thank you, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess, And the publican standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes unto heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying, God be merciful to me a sinner. I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other: for every one that exalts himself shall be abased; and he that humbles himself shall be exalted.

Let us notice first of all that the Pharisee despised others. This is critical to understanding what pride motivates. What we are dealing with here is religious egotism. The word "despise" means "to count as nothing," "to be contemptuous of." Pride had deceived the Pharisee into thinking that he was better than others. Now how can a person have a good relationship with someone that he despises? God loved us while we were yet sinners. There is the other end of the extreme, you see.

Are we beginning to see pride's path? Pride finds fertile ground and begins the process of deceitful evaluations. What this parable reveals is a misguided confidence in the self. That caused the Pharisee to magnify himself, but all the while that is happening it is bringing him into war with God, and separating him from Him, as well as the one he is looking down on.

The picture begins to come clear here. If any one of us begins to feel contaminated in the presence of a brother, and begins to withdraw from him, or constantly finds fault with him, and is being offended by almost everything he does, one might just be on the path to real trouble. The sin of pride may be producing its fruit, and the dividing away is its evidence.

In this parable we have a self-applauding law keeper and the abased Publican. Both are equally sinners, but in different areas. It is not that one is simply good and the other bad. Both are alike, but the outward form of each one's sin is different. The proud man deluded himself into thinking he had a righteousness that he in reality did not possess, and so his prayer is full of self-congratulation. It is "I," "I," "I," like a circle around him.

There is no lowly sense expressing what he owed God, and no thanksgiving for what God had given him, and no praise for what God is. He asked for nothing. He confessed nothing. He received nothing. But there is a very pronounced comparison with others. The man was filled with conceit and totally unaware of it. His pride had hid it from him, while at the same time blocked real access to God by deceiving him into concentrating his judgment on the Publican sinner who was contaminating his world.

The Publican did not delude himself into thinking that he was righteous, and he was not. Remember that Jesus said the Publicans and sinners go into the Kingdom before the Scribes and Pharisees. The difference between the two was the Publican's truer evaluation of and recognition of what he was in relation to God.

The difference between the two men in the parable is that the one evaluated himself only good, and the other only lacking. How different in spirit and approach these two are. Anyone who thinks that he is going to supply anything of great worth to the salvation process is deluding himself. The one

flattered himself and was full of self-commendation. The other was full of self-*condemnation*, and sought mercy.

Their approach and attitude toward God and self were poles apart. One stood apart because he was not the kind of man to mingle with his inferiors. The other stood apart because he considered himself unworthy to associate himself with others. One haughtily lifted his eyes to heaven; the other blushed even to look up. One was puffed up with his merit; the other pleads for mercy. This parable truly shows the difference between what is acceptable to God, and what is not.

Remember the Edomites from the previous verse. They looked at their stronghold, and then at themselves, and finally at their enemy. Their evaluation was that they were stronger than all, and were impregnable. The result was a conclusion that was in error because it left God out of the picture, and therein lies much of the problem concerning pride. God is either left out or minimized in the picture. So against whom are we evaluating ourselves?

Pride almost invariably chooses to compare itself with those considered inferior. It must do this in order to not lose its sense of superiority. If it evaluates itself against one who is superior, its quality diminishes because the evaluation changes. Therefore it *must* find fault with the other in order to bring that one lower than the self. Pride's power is in **deceit**, and the ground it plows in order to produce its evil is in faulty evaluations.

It is interesting that in these days we are told by psychologists that we must have self-esteem, self-assurance, and self-respect, and in some small measure these are good. However, unchecked by human nature, those qualities quickly become arrogance, insolence, presumption, self-importance, egotism, conceit, and then they turn into idolatry, hatred, murder, adultery, and lying. This is why, brethren, children **must be spanked**. It is a type of God inflicting pain upon us to shape us and form us into what we must be. Without the affliction of pain, pride will have its way, and it will have its way with a child. That is why God says if you do not spank your child, you hate him. You do not even realize you are preparing that child to be egotistical and filled with self-importance.

On this day we are commanded to afflict *ourselves* in order to help deflate pride. Fasting is the external means given to assist us in this. Fasting is a self-imposed discipline, a self-imposed affliction that brings upon us a small measure of discomfort.

I think that this one-day fast gives us insight into God's mercy. He could have imposed something much more difficult and painful, requiring a great deal more discipline and endurance, and He has the right to do so. But instead He chose something that also shows us how much we need the things He so generously supplies, like food and water. Without these things we would not last very long, would we? We live only because He continually sustains His creation. Brethren, the same is true spiritually. Without what He has so graciously and generously supplied, we would not live long spiritually either.

Let us conclude with the book we were in so frequently. Turn to Isaiah 66:1-2.

Isaiah 66:1-2 Thus says the Lord, The heaven is my throne, and the earth is my footstool: where is the house that you build unto me? And where is the place of my rest? For all those things has my hand made, and all those things have been, says the Lord. But to this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembles at my word.

These verses summarize humility's importance. Do we want God to look at us in accepting kindness? Humility—being poor of spirit—is the key to access and oneness with God once He has revealed Himself to us. Even as it is the key with God, it is also the key to oneness with our brother. Jesus pointed to humility's importance by listing it first among those qualities that His brothers and sisters will have.

God's way of achieving oneness is for each person to be so attuned to Him that he is moved to do everything possible to ensure that the relationship is not only unbroken, but is constantly becoming closer, because we are becoming more like Him.

Each person is responsible for cleaning up his own act, and humbling himself before God, and not responsible for judging one another's brother so critically that it drives wedges that separate. Such a person does not even see his own sin and could not be in God's Kingdom in such a case, because separations would continue right on into it.