

Disciple-making Wisdom Regarding Spiritual Pride from The Great Awakening, 1740

From *The Works of Jonathan Edwards*, pp. 353-364.

1. Spiritual pride is “the worst cause of errors” for those seeking to obey the Great Commission.

“The first, and the worst cause of errors, that prevail in such a state of things, is spiritual pride. This is the main door, by which the devil comes into the hearts of those that are zealous for the advancement of religion. It is the chief inlet of smoke from the bottomless pit, to darken the mind, and mislead the judgment: this is the main handle by which the devil has hold of religious persons, and the chief source of all the mischief that he introduces, to clog and hinder a work of God” (353).

2. Humility sets a person out of the devil’s reach.

“The spiritually proud man is full of light already, he does not need instruction, and is ready to despise the offer of it. But if this disease be healed, other things are easily rectified. The humble person is like a little child, he easily receives instruction; he is jealous over himself, sensible how liable he is to go astray; and therefore, if it be suggested to him that he does so, he is ready most narrowly and impartially to inquire. Nothing sets a person so much out of the devil’s reach, as humility, and so prepares the mind for true divine light, without darkness, and so clears the eye to look on things as they truly are. Psal. xxv. 9, “The meek will he guide in judgment, and the meek he will teach his way” (353; see also 1 Pet. 5:5-6).

3. Pride is a problem for us all.

“Alas, how much pride have the best of us in our hearts! It is the worst part of the body of sin and death: it is the first sin that ever entered into the universe, and the last that is rooted out: it is God’s most stubborn enemy” (353).

4. Pride is the most secret of faults.

“There are many sins of the heart that are very secret in their nature, and difficultly discerned. The Psalmist says, Psal. xix. 12, “Who can understand his errors? Cleanse thou me from secret faults.” But spiritual pride is the most secret of all sins. . . . We had need therefore to have the greatest watch imaginable, over our hearts, with respect to this matter, and to cry most earnestly to the great searcher of hearts, for his help. He that trusts his own heart is a fool” (354; C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, “The Great Sin”: “I now come to that part of Christian morals where they differ most sharply from all other morals. There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice. And at the same time, I have very seldom met anyone, who was not a Christian, who showed the slightest mercy to it in others. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. “The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit: and the virtue opposite to it, in Christian morals, is called Humility” (121)).

5. Pride is critical of others rather than of self.

“Spiritual pride disposes to speak of other persons’ sins, their enmity against God and his people, the miserable delusion of hypocrites and their enmity against vital piety, and the deadness of some saints, with bitterness, or with laughter and levity, and an air of contempt ; whereas pure Christian humility rather

disposes, either to be silent about them, or to speak of them with grief and pity. Spiritual pride is very apt to suspect others: whereas a humble saint is most jealous of himself, he is so suspicious of nothing in the world as he is of his own heart. . . . the eminently humble Christian has so much to do at home, and sees so much evil in his own heart, and is so concerned about it, that he is not apt to be very busy with others' hearts" (355).

6. Humility can distinguish Satan from Satan's captive.

"And though we read that Christ once turned and said unto Peter, on a certain occasion, 'Get thee behind me, Satan'; and this may seem like an instance of harshness and severity in reproofing Peter; yet I humbly conceive that this is by many taken wrong, and that this is indeed no instance of Christ's severity in his treatment of Peter, but on the contrary, of his wonderful gentleness and grace, distinguishing between Peter and the devil in him, not laying the blame of what Peter had then said, or imputing it to him, but to the devil that influenced him" (357; see also 2 Tim. 2:24-26).

7. Humility can distinguish convictions from opinions.

"Whereas the eminently humble person, though he be inflexible in his duty, and in those things wherein God's honor is concerned; and with regard to temptation to those things he apprehends to be sinful, though in never so small a degree, he is not at all of a yieldable spirit, but is like a brazen wall ; yet in other things he is of a pliable disposition, not disposed to set up his own opinion, or his own will ; he is ready to pay deference to others' opinions, and loves to comply with their inclinations, and has a heart that is tender and flexible like a little child" (358).

8. Pride is a cause of unnecessary divisions.

"Spiritual pride disposes persons to affect separation, to stand at a distance from others, as better than they, and loves the show and appearance of the distinction: but on the contrary, the eminently humble Christian is ready to look upon himself as not worthy that others should be united to him, to think himself more brutish than any man, and worthy to be cast out of human society, and especially unworthy of the society of God's children ; and though he will not be a companion with one that is visibly Christ's enemy, and delights most in the company of lively Christians . . . ; yet . . . his universal benevolence delights in the appearance of union with his fellow creatures, and will maintain it as much as he possibly can, without giving open countenance to iniquity, or wounding his own soul" (358).

9. Pride is unforgiving; humility is forgiving.

"Spiritual pride takes great notice of opposition and injuries that are received, and is apt to be often speaking of them, and to be much in taking notice of the aggravations of them, either with an air of bitterness or contempt: whereas pure unmixed Christian humility, disposes a person rather to be like his blessed Lord, when reviled, dumb, not opening his mouth, but committing himself in silence to him that judgeth righteously" (359).

10. Humility is teachable.

"One under the influence of spiritual pride is more apt to instruct others, than to inquire for himself, and naturally puts on the airs of a master: whereas one that is full of pure humility, naturally has on the air of a disciple; his voice is, ' What shall I do? What shall I do that I may live more to God's honor? What shall I do with this wicked heart?' He is ready to receive instruction from anybody, agreeable to Jam. i. 19, ' Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak'" (362).