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Proverbs: Pride (Part 2)



Proverbs - Steve Gregg

In part two of his discussion on pride, Steve Gregg delves into the dangers of a haughty and proud attitude. He emphasizes that wisdom hates pride and that it is important to fear the Lord and hate pride. He encourages listeners to associate with lowly people and not strive for social climbing or prestigious positions, citing Proverbs as his source for these wisdom teachings. Gregg warns against giving into the temptations of the world and seeking honor from others rather than from God alone.

Transcript

All right, we have, I imagine, a couple more sessions in Proverbs before we finish up everything we want to cover. One of those is right now. Of course, we're going to be looking at Proverbs, continuing to look at subjects related to the pride of life.

And last time we looked at quite a few Proverbs that talked about the way a man views himself in his own eyes. That people tend to be proud of themselves. They tend to make excuses for themselves.

They tend to be pure in their own eyes or wise in their own eyes or good in their own eyes. These are many things that Proverbs says as it talks about human nature and the tendency to evaluate yourself favorably. Perhaps more favorably than an objective witness would evaluate you.

It's just sort of our desire to be justified, frankly. You know, it seems that ever since the fall, there has been a human impulse to be justified. That is to justify our behavior, to cover guilt, to act as if or to believe as if we are better than we are.

Adam and Eve, of course, covered their nakedness with fig leaves when they sinned. And that itself shows a primeval human impulse to cover up guilt and to pretend like all is well when it isn't. And obviously the message of the Bible is that God has provided a justification for sinners in Christ.

But people who don't find justification in Christ will always, of course, be seeking to justify themselves. And that means sometimes rationalizing behavior and managing

somehow to convince ourselves that whatever we are is not quite as bad as a more objective evaluation might suggest. And so we saw a lot of scriptures that point to this human tendency.

Now, there's a lot of miscellaneous scriptures about pride and proud behavior. And not all of it is about arrogance, per se, but rather just about one's concern about one's own image, one's own reputation and things like that, which are all parts of pride. Not all of them are glaring.

Arrogance is a glaring form of pride that everyone can see and everybody is repulsed by when they see it in other people. But a lot of times pride is more subtle. And frankly, not all pride is really sinful.

It's possible to be proud without giving oneself credit. Pride is a word we use sometimes simply meaning to be pleased, to be proud of your children's performances, meaning you're pleased with their performance. You feel, that's my son, that's my daughter who's doing that.

And that's not necessarily a kind of pride unless it's translating in your own mind to a sense of personal self-importance. And especially if it makes you feel like you somehow are better than other people. Obviously, there are mild forms of pride that are not really damaging and not probably sinful.

But what we're talking about is where somebody fails to acknowledge their true status under God as a creature, as a fallen creature, and recognize that we are not really that good, that we're not really that competent, that we're not that powerful, that we really are needy people. We need mercy and we need assistance from God and we're not really better than other people. We might be in some measures better than certain other people.

There would be some people who behave worse than we do. There may be some people who are less gifted than we are. But even if that's true, and it is of course true, there are things in which each of us would excel over certain other persons that we might compare ourselves with.

Paul said, what do you have that you've not received? The thing that makes you different from another person is simply something God has given you and not something you've earned or asked for or applied for, accomplished yourself. And even the things that appear to be things that we've accomplished ourselves, and we all have done some things, we've all applied ourselves to certain things and reached certain goals that others have not reached. But even the ability to apply ourselves is an ability God has given.

Perhaps even the motivation to do so is a gift that God has given. And so we really can't

take credit for much of anything. God knows what we should be credited with and he will give us credit where credit is due on the day of judgment.

But it is not our place to be seeking recognition or acknowledgement and credit for our accomplishments or for us to think very much about them as being of ourselves. Paul said in 2 Corinthians 3, not that we are sufficient of ourselves for anything, but our sufficiency is of God. He says this after he's talked a great deal about his own ministry and its own power and effectiveness.

That's in 2 Corinthians 3. He says, for example, in verse 3, You are manifestly an epistle of Christ, ministered by us, written not with ink, but by the Spirit of the living God, not on tablets of stone, but on tablets of the flesh, that is of the heart. In other words, the change in your lives is our doing. It's really the Holy Spirit's doing, but you are the epistle that we, through the Holy Spirit, have written.

You're the fruit of our efforts, of our ministry. But he says, and we have such trust through Christ toward God, not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think of anything as being from ourselves. But our sufficiency is from God, who made us sufficient as ministers of the new covenant.

So he recognizes that God has accomplished things through him. And no doubt Paul could be mindful of the sacrifices he himself has made and the suffering he has endured and all the efforts he's put out that others have not put out that have resulted in the fruit. But he says that God is the one who made us sufficient for this.

Our sufficiency is of God. We don't think we're the ones who have accomplished anything at all. As he said in that other place in 1 Corinthians 3, he said, I planted and Paul was watered, but God gave the increase, even the growth of the church.

Much as it was the result of Paul's hard work and labor, he said, really, I couldn't make anything happen, only God can do that. It's very common for medical doctors to acknowledge this. They say, we can't heal anybody, we can set the bone or we can prescribe a medication, but if it's going to be healed, God's going to have to do the healing.

Many doctors have observed that. They recognize that we've put out the effort and God has to produce the result because all of our efforts may come to nothing. And therefore, we don't even have anything to boast about in what has been accomplished through our energies.

In chapter 21 of Proverbs, verse 24, it says, A proud and haughty man, Scoffer is his name, he acts with arrogant pride. This is just a rather obvious observation rather than a profound insight. It's almost a definition.

A scoffer is a haughty and proud man, somebody who scoffs at other people. Anyone

who scoffs at somebody else or scoffs at someone else's ideas is proud. It is possible to critique other people's ideas without being proud.

But to scoff is to heap scorn upon somebody else as if their ideas were unworthy, their ideas were foolish, their ideas exhibit inferiority on the part of the person whom they're scoffing at. This is an arrogant way of life when people are mocking, scoffing, scorning other people. It is simply a proud and haughty spirit that does that.

A person who's not haughty will not mock other people. They will critique them but not mock them. I received an email just the other day from somebody who said they were upset that somebody was permitted to mock Roman Catholics on my show and that I hadn't stopped them.

I remember the phone call. The caller hadn't mocked the Roman Catholics. The caller had made a criticism of Roman Catholics.

He had been in Uganda and had seen that the Roman Catholic Church was just shot through with superstition and even occultism. The person was asking me whether I thought that people might have become demon possessed through their involvement in the Catholic Church in Uganda. I said, well, I do know that in some third world countries the Roman Catholic Church, at least people who attend the Roman Catholic Church, are often also involved in native superstitions and things.

There can be demonism there. That's what we said. A guy wrote to me and said, you mock Roman Catholics.

We weren't mocking anybody. We were just making observations. You can't criticize without being a mocker.

There wasn't any arrogance in the callers or my tone. There was just a discussion of sober facts. Some people would feel that they shouldn't be criticized because then they feel embarrassed.

They're so wedded to their ideas or to their movement or some identity that they feel under attack if there's a mere observation of a legitimate criticism. That's not what this is talking about. This is talking about scoffing and mocking, treating somebody as if they are inferior.

Of course, the person who treats somebody else as if they are inferior is proud and is probably, in that respect, at least inferior to the person they are mocking because pride is a defect. In chapter 28 and verse 25 it says, He who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, but he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered. It's not easy to see precisely how these two members of this poem, of this proverb, contrast directly with each other.

The statement by itself, the first one, he who is of a proud heart stirs up strife, is

agreeable with that other proverb that says only by pride comes contention. That people get into fights and strife and arguments because they are proud. If a person is sufficiently humble, he doesn't mind letting the other person have the last word.

He'd rather see that happen than see strife and contention and unpleasantness in a relationship. The relationship is worth more than the point we're trying to establish. Unless, of course, the point is one of absolute righteousness against evil.

Then, in many cases, the point is worth hanging on to and not giving in on. But then, if it's a matter of righteousness, it's not a matter of opinion. That is to say, you're not proud because you're standing for God or for what God says.

That's not pride. When people say, you Christians seem so proud because you say you're the only ones who are saved. Well, we didn't make that up.

It's not like we're proud. If we were making it up, we might be more generous. But we don't have the choice to alter what we believe is true.

It's not proud to stand for something that is true and is declared to be true by God. That's not pride. It might be the kind of thing that would engender pride in some people.

But it's not a statement that itself comes out of pride. But that's, of course, standing for an absolute righteousness that is declared by God. In most cases, at least between believers, strife is over opinions.

My opinion, my assessment of something, as opposed to somebody else's, and I think mine is better, for the most part, because it's mine. I might, in fact, have better reasons for my opinion than the other person does, but they don't see that immediately, and they may contend over that. And the real problem of pride is not that you're standing on truth against what's manifestly error, but that you're standing on that which is yours, your opinion.

You want to be right. Now, if it is standing for truth, that's not the same thing. But where there's pride, a proud person should be contending all the time because he's not going to be willing to be acknowledged to be wrong.

Pride doesn't like to be called wrong. Pride wants to be right. And, therefore, when somebody always wants to be right and insists on being right, then there's going to be contention because other people are going to be proud, too.

Other people are going to want to make sure that they're seen to be right. And, therefore, the persons, two persons who are proud and who both want to be vindicated in the eyes of those, maybe of the other person or of the onlookers who know of the conversation, they want to have the final word. They want to have the final point.

They can't stop striving until they feel that they have won. And, of course, if both parties are equally proud, the contention goes on indefinitely. It's a humble thing to just decide, you know, it's okay if you think I'm wrong.

Maybe I am, you know. Let's just not argue about this anymore. Maybe I'm not wrong, but it looks like we're not going to be able to resolve that.

It's more important that we be able to relate as Christians to each other than to try to prove ourselves right. But it says, he who is of a proud heart stirs up strife. That certainly is a tendency.

The other part of it, he who trusts in the Lord will be prospered, sounds like almost like a separate proverb unrelated. Unless he who trusts in the Lord, in contrast to he who is of a proud heart, is speaking about the specific kind of a proud heart that doesn't trust in the Lord but trusts in oneself. Obviously, there is that option.

People don't always trust in the Lord, and when they do, they're usually trusting in themselves. And that could be seen as a proud heart, having a lot of self-confidence. Then it's not as clear why it's mentioning specifically the stirring up strife in connection with pride.

Because it would seem that a proud heart, when it means trusting oneself instead of trusting God, would put one more at odds with God than with other people. But, in any case, we do have this proverb making it very clear that pride and contention go hand in hand. The other verse I mentioned is Proverbs 13, 10, about this.

Only by pride comes contention. Or, as I mentioned before, I think we looked at this earlier in talking about relationships. The New King James says, by pride comes only contention.

And so, some translations render it. So, the King James makes it, only by pride comes contention. Meaning that you will never have contention except as a result of pride.

And, therefore, the affirmation would be, where there is contention, there clearly must be pride because contention only comes as a result of pride. But the way it's worded in this other version, and some other versions besides, is by pride comes only contention. Meaning, not so much that contention is always caused by pride, but pride never produces anything better than contention.

In any case, the connection between pride and contention is affirmed in more than one place. In chapter 8, in verse 13, we have, in that chapter, wisdom is speaking, personified as a woman making her appeal to people to become wise and to accept her goods, her wisdom, as opposed to the foolishness that men often choose. And she is saying this in Proverbs 8, 13, The fear of the Lord is to hate evil, pride and arrogance, and the evil way and the perverse mouth I hate.

Who hates? Wisdom hates it. Now, wisdom here is personified, but of course we have to realize we are supposed to have wisdom as a characteristic in ourselves. Therefore, what wisdom hates, we should hate.

In fact, the fear of the Lord is to hate evil. Why? Well, we talked about the fear of the Lord earlier. The fear of the Lord is a healthy respect for the harm that a person places himself in, the danger he places himself in, when he is deliberately at odds with his creator.

It's not so much that God scares us when we're behaving, it's that the thought of misbehaving, the thought of having God angry at us, is a terrifying prospect. And therefore we hate evil, because evil is that which we see as the thing that will put us at odds with God. God hates evil, and so must we if we want to fear God's righteous interaction with us.

If we're doing evil, then His interaction will be harsh with us. It must be. And it says that pride and arrogance, and the evil way, and the perverse mouth, wisdom hates.

So, if you fear the Lord, you also hate pride. The fear of the Lord and personal humility obviously must go together. And I know that when I was young, and first adopting my attitudes toward life and ministry and my Christian walk and so forth, I remember how humility in the Bible was so frequently mentioned as something that God requires.

And that He resists the proud, and He gives grace to the humble. And humble yourself and say, Lord, so He may lift you up. But if you raise yourself up, He'll have to humble you.

That there is this interaction between the creation and the creator. That the creator must be exalted, and the creation must be self-abasing, self-humbling, lowering itself to its proper place, rather than trying to elevate itself in its own estimation to the level of God. And people have that tendency to elevate themselves to the level of God, even if they wouldn't say so brazenly, I am God.

As frankly, some human beings have, but not very many. But to act as if they are God, to think as if they are God, to act as if the prerogatives of God were their prerogatives. And that is to compete with God for the position that can only be held by one party.

Supreme ruler. And if God is in that position, and you're trying to be in that position, you and God are in competition. And He's a lot bigger than you, I don't want to come into competition with God.

I don't want Him to have to knock me down. I'd rather keep myself down. And frankly, the fear of God has always been a conscious thing.

The fear of pride, the hatred of pride, is related to the fear of God, because you know

that if you are proud, God resists the proud. And to be resisted by God, hey, life is hard enough even when God's on your side. Even with God helping you, life is difficult.

To have God resisting you, well, you're really asking for trouble. And so, the fear of that, the fear of being at odds with, in competition with God for the credit or the glory or the honor or whatever, for whatever accomplishments are worked through me, to be seeking any of that for myself is a scary thing. It's not just wrong, it's scary.

Because who wants to be resisted by God and opposed by God? Why would I want to do something that would obligate God to reduce me lower than I already am? To humble oneself under the mighty hand of God so that He may lift you up is manifestly attractive as well as right. And so, also wisdom, if you're wise, well, you must fear God to be wise, because fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom. But also, you will hate pride.

If you are wise and if you fear God, you'll hate pride, because wisdom hates pride. In chapter 11, verse 2, I'm talking about pride in yourself. Now, you can hate arrogance in other people too, but it shouldn't be because their arrogance chafes against your arrogance.

And that is so often the case. You know, I hate that person's arrogance. Why? I don't know.

Probably because I'm arrogant and their arrogance is in conflict with mine. The same reason God hates arrogance in me, that God is not arrogant, but He holds a position that He's jealous over and it's wrong for anyone else to try to elevate themselves in their own minds to that position. So, if somebody else's arrogance bothers me, it may be that my arrogance is simply vying for them for the position of prominence and attention that they're getting or that they're seeking.

And I want that. But it's possible to hate arrogance for the same reason in others that you hate it in yourself, that you fear God. You know, the psalmist said at one point in Psalm 119, Terror or horror has taken hold of me because of those who forsake your law.

Sometimes you see others who are courting disaster by their behavior and you're terrified on their behalf. Paul said, Not that I'm afraid of God, I'm afraid for them. Knowing how terrifying it is for these people to face God unprepared, we persuade them, we are motivated to persuade them.

We hate arrogance in other people because we see that they are setting themselves up to be resisted by God. And that gives us the shivers just to think that it could happen to anybody, not just us. And so, arrogance is an ugly thing that a wise person will always find repulsive.

In themselves first, and then also, of course, in others. In chapter 11, verse 2, it says, When pride comes, then comes shame. And with the humble is wisdom.

When pride comes, shame follows. Not every single instance, but ultimately. If you exalt yourself, God will ultimately have to humble you.

And Jesus said, when you go to a feast, don't seek the high, prestigious positions at the table. Because then, someone more prestigious than you might arrive, and the host will say, oh, I'm sorry, you're going to have to relinquish this seat. Someone more important than you has arrived.

And Jesus said, then with shame, with embarrassment, you'll have to, in front of everybody, get down and go to a lower position at the table. Because you had arrogantly sought a high position for yourself, and then you have to publicly be humiliated by being reduced. He said, when you go to the feast, take the lowest seats.

And if you end up staying there, that's fine. But on the other hand, it may be that the host will come and say, wait a minute, you belong in a better position than that. Come up higher, brother, come up higher.

And then, he says, then you'll have praise, and you'll have honor in front of people. You humble yourself, and then comes honor. But if you are initially proud, well, then there will be situations where you're humbled.

If you're boastful, if you're always trying to present yourself as something better than other people, then reality eventually will be discovered. You aren't. You're not superior.

The fact that you're boastful is a strong evidence that you're not superior. Because superior people aren't proud. Pride is a defect.

And when you're proud, that itself is a mark of inferiority. Because a better man would be humble. But when you are boastful, of course, the idea is you're trying to give people the impression that you're the best at whatever.

You want people to admire you on the basis that you're better than most people. But even if you are better than most people in some respects, the more you have built yourself up in that area, the more every defect in that area is going to be glaring to the public eye. If a person boasts about his athletic ability or his musical ability or his debating ability or any other thing, he may in fact be good at any of those things, but he's not perfect.

And every imperfection will glare, will shine brightly. The more so because one has boasted of how good he is. Whereas if a person is not boastful, I'm not saying they should be self-deprecating.

If you're good at something, there's no reason that you should deny it. But you don't have to talk about it much. You don't have to call attention to it much.

Because there will be times that no matter how good you are, you will have a failure in some area. You won't be perfect. But no one's going to think much of it of you being imperfect if you haven't made a big deal about being great.

So where there's pride, you're always setting yourself up for shame. And the wise are humble. With the humble is wisdom.

In chapter 13 and verse 10, we already saw this. By pride comes only contention, but with the well-advised is wisdom. We won't say more about that because I spent some time on that thought a few moments ago.

Chapter 15, verse 25. The Lord will destroy the house of the proud, that he will establish the boundary of the widow. The house of the proud, not only he will come to shame, but his house will be destroyed.

Not every time. Remember, Proverbs is not making absolute statements. No doubt Solomon, however, had lived long enough and observed enough to see men who were proud who brought destruction on their whole family, on their whole estate, on their whole house because of their being too proud to take advice when they should have taken advice, too proud to respond to rebuke when they were doing something foolish or evil and they brought disaster upon their entire home and house.

In chapter 16 and verse 5, it says, Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord. Though they join forces, none will go unpunished. Now, if people are proud in their hearts, this is another reason to fear God and be humble, is that you're an abomination to God.

Abomination means something that is intolerable. And if something is intolerable to God, that means ultimately he won't tolerate it. And one thing we definitely want is for God to be tolerant of us, gracious toward us.

And so to be an abomination to him and make ourselves odious to him is an extremely foolish decision. Proverbs 16 and 18 says, Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall. And it's from this proverb that the more succinct saying, Pride goes before a fall, is drawn.

And most people think the Bible says Pride goes before a fall. Well, it does, but not quite in those words. It says it here in these words.

Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. And here we see the parallelism of Hebrew poetry, as we do in most of the proverbs, that pride and a haughty spirit are the same thing, and destruction and a fall are the same thing. You're courting disaster.

Verse 19 of that same chapter says, Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to

divide the spoil with the proud. So even to be rich, to have spoils divided to you and you get your share of the wealth, but the people you're sharing with are proud persons like yourself, or at least proud persons, maybe more proud than yourself, but they're not the people you want to be with. Better to be among the humble.

Better to be in low circumstances and have humble companions, rather than to have haughty and arrogant companions, even though there may be some financial profit in their company and in the association. In chapter 29, 23, Solomon said, Man's pride will bring him low, but the humble in spirit will retain honor. So we have it again and again.

Pride, because it's an abomination to the Lord, those who fear the Lord will hate it. And the reason they will hate it is because they fear the Lord. What is it they fear? Well, these many things.

Pride will bring shame. Pride will bring destruction. Pride will bring a fall.

Pride just brings a man low. And therefore, pride is an enemy of the soul. It's an enemy of one's well-being in the end.

It's an enemy of one's reputation. It's just a bad thing. You don't want to be proud.

There are examples and warnings in Proverbs about the whole phenomenon of seeking to suck up to the right people in order to gain advantage to oneself. Social climbing, the desire to be in the right circles. This desire is very seldom due to anything other than pride.

There may be cases where God wishes for somebody to have an outreach among certain inaccessible circles and God will give that person favor. And perhaps people that the world admires will invite or will welcome a Christian into their circles because God has given them favor, has given the Christian favor in those crowds. Perhaps because God has given that Christian success or wisdom or something else that causes them to stand among great men.

But the desire to be among great men or to be seen as the companion of a great man is really a proud thing. Unless, of course, I mean, like I said, a person may care nothing about that and yet God places them in those positions. Billy Graham, for example, has always had access to presidents and kings and congressmen and celebrities.

I don't think Billy Graham has ever really cared much about that. Billy Graham appears to be a very humble man. For a man with as much recognition and respect that he gets, he doesn't seem to think that much about himself.

It seems to me. And I've observed his ministry over more than 50 years. Not from up close, but I have read from people who do know him up close that it's the same in person as in public, that the man is a humble man.

It's not so much that being in the crowds of the recognized and the esteemed and the celebrities, that that is proud. It's not, if God puts you there. It's wanting to be there that's proud.

It's the desire to get into those circles that is proud. The desire to climb socially. Why would one want to do that? Well, it's possible that if someone is a true intellectual or a true superior person in some area that he enjoys or she enjoys the company of others who are good at that.

It's much more interesting to an intellectual to talk with and visit with other intellectuals that stimulate them. I'm sure that people who are athletes love to associate with other athletes. And, you know, people who share their interests.

For the most part, people who want to be in those circles, but aren't qualified, but want to get in there anyway, who don't really have those characteristics that have made the other people famous, but want to sort of become famous on the coattails of the other celebrity, just by association, to have people think them to be important because they are with important people. I've heard say that among secular people advising people who are dating, that if you have friends who are good looking, then you will look more good looking to the opposite sex because they'll see that you're associated with good looking people. I don't know if that's true or not, but I could see how there are certain psychological factors that might give that impression.

Even if you don't have the qualities that the people you want to be with have, you hope that by being with them, people will think that you have them. The whole phenomenon of name dropping is part of this thing, where you want to mention any important person you've ever been close to or that you've associated with, so people will think that you're like them, like that person that you're associated with. It's part of that social climbing urge.

In chapter 16 of Proverbs, in verse 19, we mentioned this a moment ago. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly than to divide the spoil with the proud. To associate with lowly people, we're told in the New Testament to condescend to men of low estate.

Condescension seems like a bad word to us because we don't want people to, as we would say, condescend to us. What that really means is that people act in a condescending way toward us, and we're proud. We don't like to be condescended to because we don't think we're that much lower.

To condescend means someone comes down to your level, and we don't want people to condescend to us because we think that that means that they think they're above us and have to come down to our level when we think, in fact, we're not that low. We're not below them. There's no reason they should have to condescend to us.

We're at their level or above, and therefore it hurts our pride to be condescended to. But condescension, in the best sense of the word, means that you don't think you're better than somebody else, or if you have advantages that other people don't have, then you don't act like you have those. You don't act as if those are important or defining of you.

You just come down to the level of other people who don't have those advantages. That's a positive thing. To associate with the humble is something that is advised.

It keeps you humble. It's a humbling of yourself, even. Because if you happen to be a superior person in some respects, and some people are, then the world will eventually notice that and honor you, and people who are also of the same type of superiority will welcome you into their circles and so forth.

And then you will have the option, of course, of being recognized and being one of the in crowd and things like that. But if you leave that crowd, so to speak, and associate not as one who is ostentatiously condescending, but truly coming down to the level of ordinary people and living among them, this is a sign of true humility and is definitely a desirable place to be in your heart. In chapter 23, there's this long section of eight verses which talk about warning not to make too much effort to get in the in crowd with the rich or with the mighty.

But you need to be careful around those kind of people. Because if they do include you in their crowd, they usually have ulterior motives. They want to get something from you.

He says in chapter 23, when you sit down to eat with a ruler, consider carefully what is before you. Put a knife to your throat if you're given to appetite. Do not desire his delicacies for they are deceptive food.

Well, what's so deceptive about their food? He's not talking about the calories. Oops, you're going to get fatter than you think. You wake up in the morning and you say, well, I didn't think I ate that much.

That's deceptive. That's not what he's talking about. He's talking about the invitation itself that came to you from the ruler.

Unless you're a ruler yourself. But even if you are, even if you're another ruler, when you're invited to a ruler's house to eat, generally speaking, he wants to get something out of you. It looks like, and it's calculated to look like, he's just being generous to you.

But he has something in mind he wants to get from you. He wants you to agree to something. He wants to make some kind of a deal with you.

And there's often a price tag for being in those circles. People will invite you into those circles if you'll put out something they want you to put out. So we often have heard about young women who want to be movie stars.

How that they, there's the expression, the casting couch. You know, how they want to get into movies so bad that the directors and the producers and so forth will be allowed to have their way with them in ways that they wouldn't allow themselves to be treated by other people. But it's a social climbing compromise.

You know, they're invited to be part of the party, but something is expected of them. They're not just being valued for who they are or for their talent. They're being used.

And so it usually is when you try to get into the social elite crowd. They may respect you. If you are really superior to them, they may look up to you in some ways.

But in most cases, you're probably not superior and they don't think you are. They just see you as another person that wants to be in their crowd and will put out something for them to be there. He says, do not overwork to be rich because of your own understanding's feasts.

Will you set your eyes on that which is not, that is on that which is of no value, really? For riches certainly make themselves wings. They fly away like an eagle toward heaven. If you're striving to be rich, it's usually for reputation's sake.

I mean, it may be for something else, but being among the rich seems to be in this particular section of Proverbs 23, part of being wanting to be among rulers and so forth. It says in verse 6, do not eat the bread of a miser, nor desire his delicacies. For as he thinks in his heart, so is he.

Eat and drink, he says to you, but his heart is not with you. The more you eat, you'll vomit it up and waste your pleasant words. So here we have a number of similar kinds of sayings.

When you eat with a ruler, when you eat with a miser, which is usually a rich man, or when you're striving to be rich yourself, these are all things that are temptations to make yourself more important in the eyes of people, to occupy a more honorable and respected and revered and envied position in society. You need to be careful about that and not be a sucker to the temptations associated with that. In chapter 24, verse 1, it says, do not be envious of evil men, nor desire to be with them.

Why would you be envious of evil men? Well, it might be because you just like to do bad things, but you don't let yourself, and they let themselves, so you envy them because they get away with sinning that you won't let yourself get away with. Or you might envy them because they are important, admired men, but they happen to be evil. Movie stars certainly would often fall into that category.

Politicians often fall into that category. Even those who lead large corporations may fall into that category. They may be very compromised in their moral lives.

They may be very compromised in their business lives. But people admire them. Do not be envious of them.

Because the person you're envious of is the person that you're going to really try to be like. And we're talking about people here who are evil. There may be something about them that makes you envious of them, the recognition they have in the society.

But they are evil. Don't make them the object of your envy because then you'll be speaking to one of you like them, and that's not the right goal. Don't desire even to be with them, it says.

The Proverbs also have quite a few references to the importance of choosing the right companions and the danger of the influence that wrong companions will have upon you, and what we would call peer pressure. And we all know what that is. And we know what it's like to be with people that we don't want their disfavor.

And so we go along with things, maybe not entirely, but maybe just a little more than we should, because we don't want to oppose the group or the individual that we hope to be liked by. And therefore, that person has power over our behavior. We're under pressure to conform.

That's called peer pressure, and we know that term. It has to do with just that natural desire to be pleasing to the people that you want to be with, and the people that you want to like you. And therefore, while sometimes, if you've got a strong backbone and good principles, you will stand up strongly to the group and oppose what they're saying, but that's always difficult, because there's always a stronger pressure the other way to just conform and fit in, at least to the group that you want to be in.

Now, the main issue here is, since that is true, it would make a lot of sense to pick your companions wisely, so that they will not be putting pressure upon you to do the wrong things, because there will be pressure. Whether your companions are good or bad, there will be peer pressure. If you have good companions, that pressure will be toward being good, because you'll want to resist evil urges that you have, because the peers that you have are good people, and they do not approve of bad behavior.

But if you choose bad people, they're going to very strongly urge you to be bad as they are, because the presence of a good person in a bad crowd is a very uncomfortable thing. Bad people love to be around other bad people, because their conscience tells them they're bad, but if everyone else around them is bad too, they feel like, you know, if God grades on a curve, they can't do too badly, because everyone else does basically the same things they do. When everybody is bad in my circle, then my being bad doesn't seem bad.

But if one good person comes into the circle, the contrast makes everybody else look

bad. I like the story that R.C. Sproul tells, that when he was in college, there was a professor who gave a very difficult test, which almost everybody failed. And the professor was so disgusted with the performance of the group that he read their grades out loud as he handed their papers back to them.

And so he said, Miss Jones failed. Mr. Miller failed. Mr. Smith failed.

And all, name after name after name, failed, failed, failed, the health of papers. And then it came to one person, Suzy Jones, 100%. And R.C. Sproul said, do you think everyone in the class cheered for Suzy Jones? He said, they all groaned and booed because she broke the curve.

If she had failed, too, if everybody had failed, they could say the test was unfair. Nobody could pass a test like that. I failed, but so what? It's not a big deal that I failed.

Everyone fails. But get one person in there who showed that the test could be passed, that the test could be aced by someone who would put out the effort to do it. Suddenly, all the failures look like the failures that they are.

The test is vindicated and the failures are condemned. And therefore, people who are doing the wrong thing love to surround themselves with other people who are doing the wrong thing. And if somebody happens to get into the group who isn't on board, strong pressure is put upon them.

Because if a good person is in the circle of a bad group, that good person makes them all look bad. But if they can corrupt that person, then it makes them look all the better. Because it convinces them that even those who appear to be good are really not uncorruptible.

That everybody can be corrupted. And so there is this pressure of the group if you're in the wrong kind of group. And so Proverbs warns about the necessity of choosing the right kind of friends and the right kind of companions.

In chapter 1, actually Solomon started out with this concern with his son. Chapter 1, verses 10 through 18. He said, My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent.

If they say come, let us lie in wait to shed blood. Let us lurk secretly for the innocent without cause. Let us swallow them alive like shale and whole like those who go down to the pit.

We shall find all kinds of precious possessions. We shall fill our houses with spoil. Cast in your lot among us.

Let us all have one purse. My son, do not walk in the way with them. Keep your foot far from their path for their feet run to evil and they make haste to shed blood.

Surely in vain the net is spread in the sight of any bird. But they lie in wait for their own blood. They lurk secretly for their own lives.

So essentially talking to his son about the companions that would lead him astray. Stay far from them. Don't choose companions like that.

You're just asking to destroy yourself. In chapter 13, verse 20. Chapter 13, 20, Solomon says, He who walks with the wise men will be wise.

But the companion of fools will be destroyed. The companion, the one who walks with these people. If you choose wise companions, you'll pick up wisdom from them.

And the level of discourse among them will be such that brings out the wiser aspects of what you're capable of bringing up. In other words, the whole level of spirituality or wisdom or whatever will tend to conform within the whole group. And if somebody's there who's not quite as wise as the rest, he'll get wiser still by being there.

By being in the discourse, in the discussions. But the companion of fools, well, he'll be destroyed. Why? Because he'll become a fool too.

In fact, he may already be a fool, which is why he's become a companion of fools. A man who seeks fools for companions is not exhibiting wisdom. You might be a little wiser than the fools that you're with, but you won't be for long.

The fools you're with will make you a fool too. And so the choice of your companions is extremely important. When you understand how the human soul is shaped and the human will is compromised by peer pressure.

In chapter 22, verses 24 and 25, Make no friendship with an angry man and with a furious man. Do not go, lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul. If you're with somebody who's easily angered, who's a hothead, you'll pick up those ways.

If you're not a hothead and you're not easily angered, you just begin to pick up the habits of the people that you want to be with. If the person you're with is an angry man, you're going to pick up those ways. And by the way, you might consider this also in terms of what kind of media you expose yourself to.

Whether it's talk show hosts or whether it's movies and the characters that are portrayed there. Sometimes the heroes in movies are really bad people. When you watch movies, many times the heroes are really bad guys.

They are criminals or adulterers or something like that. And your admiration for them, at least for the brief time that you're watching the movie, and at any time later when you reflect on it, tends to obscure the evil of their acts. And they become, in the way the movie is made, a hero.

They might be an angry person who gets angry and is vengeful. The whole movie is about how the main character is out to avenge something that happened earlier on. And the whole movie is, you're cheering him on as he goes on and he's angrily going out to kill everyone who killed his wife or whatever.

In a sense, in the movie you're keeping company with that person. It's not a real person, it's a character in a drama, but they're real in your thinking at that time. That's why a movie is effective, is because they make it realistic.

For the moment, it's real to your imagination. And keeping company with an angry man is going to make you adopt angry habits. Keeping company with a person who's morally loose is going to tend to make you morally loose.

And in every other way, pure pressure affects what we will become. In chapter 28, verse 7, it says, But a companion of gluttons shames his father. Again, the wrong kind of companions.

This time it's gluttons. People who are just self-indulgent pleasure seekers. A glutton is not only a person who loves food, although that's what it is, but if a person is a glutton, it is because they love pleasure.

And if they love pleasure, they're probably going to be pleasure lovers in other respects too. They're not mentioned as being sexually immoral people. Usually the persons that Proverbs talks about that way are almost defining themselves in the areas of seduction and so forth.

But a person who is self-indulgent and a pleasure seeker in the area of food, I mean, that's their character. They're probably going to have difficulty avoiding seeking pleasure in all other areas of life, and therefore compromise too. It's going to bring your parents to shame eventually, if you choose that kind of companion.

It's because the kind of companions you choose reflect what you value and what you will frankly become more like. In chapter 29 verse 3, whoever loves wisdom makes his father rejoice, but a companion of harlots wastes his wealth. So here we have another similar thing.

You have a companion of gluttons, then a companion of harlots. A person who lives for his appetites, whether for food or for sex, is going to bring shame to his honorable fathers and mothers. In chapter 29 verse 24, it says whoever is a partner with a thief hates his own life.

He swears to tell the truth but reveals nothing. A person who is a partner with a thief is going to end up compromising, because if he's on the witness stand when his friend becomes a defendant, you make an oath that you'll tell the truth, but he's your friend, and therefore you tend to lie for him and reveal nothing of the truth. And you therefore

are compromising your integrity in a way that is not going to be good for you.

You hate your own life when you choose that kind of course. Being a partner with a thief, it doesn't even necessarily mean that you become more of a thief than you were before, but he's your friend, he's your companion, and you're going to be tempted to stand up for him when he's guilty. That will compromise your integrity even under oath sometimes.

You'd be careful about your companions. And of course the choice of your companions is an expression of your pride. The reason there's peer pressure is because of pride.

Because you want whoever it is that you've chosen as companions to think well of you. If you didn't have that going on, they could have no peer pressure of you. If it wasn't their approval that you were seeking, then there'd be no pressure to please them.

Of course that is the goal, is to not care so much what people think. You don't want to offend people unnecessarily, but your praise that you seek is from God, not from man. How can you believe, Jesus said, who seek honor that comes from one another? Instead of the honor that comes from God alone.

You can't even become a believer if you're in a crowd that doesn't believe and doesn't want you to believe, and you're seeking their honor. But if you seek the honor that comes from God alone, then you're not proud, and you won't compromise. That's pretty much what we have to say on that subject.

Next time, our last lecture on Proverbs, we'll talk about defects of the tongue, which many of them are related to pride as well. We'll have a separate sheet about that, and then we'll be finished with our treatment of the book of Proverbs.