

Sunday 5th August 2012 **Reading Family Church**

Title: *Humbly Receive the Word planted in you.*

Read: *Proverbs 13:13 / James 1:21*

Have you ever:

1. Been frustrated because you wanted to be or thought you were the exception to the rule?
2. Claimed better things about yourself, your family or your achievements than you, your family or your achievements deserved?
3. Told God that you aren't listening to him and are going to do your own thing on an issue?

The common factor in all of them is pride. Pride isn't limited to individuals, and is displayed at all levels of society, e.g. organisations and nations.

Of course, there is such a thing as appropriate pride e.g. winning gold medals after years of sacrifice and sweat, parents reveling in their children's achievements, nations being a force for good etc. But misplaced pride, being puffed up in our own estimations of ourselves or claiming that our achievements are better than they really are is not just wrong, it's toxic.

Proverbs has much to say about the proud. The fool of Proverbs is not labeled a fool because he lacks intelligence - he's labeled thus because he's proud, exalting his own opinion over God's (and other people's) wisdom.

Pride has two obvious faces: arrogance and self-pity. Arrogance says *"I'm great and everyone knows it!"* Self-pity (wounded pride) says *"I'm great and nobody else recognises it!"* In neither case is the attitude based on reality, truth or love. Pride when left unchecked leads to self-deception. The lie you want to believe becomes the truth to you. What starts life in your head as *"I won't accept the truth"* grows into *"I don't know what the truth is anymore."* It's the same on a societal level. We breathe an atmosphere in a society where it is more intellectually credible to believe a lie and be an atheist or agnostic than it is to believe the truth and be a Christian. How upside down is that? (Proverbs 14:12) And all because of pride. (Romans 1:21-25)

Pride is the original sin. We refused to listen to God's Word (command) and instead embraced the possibility of creating our own paradise without Him. We got caught in self-preoccupation and wanting the serpent's flattery to be true and so we deceived ourselves (like addicts often do) into believing the crazy notion that there might be abundant life in disobedience and plunged the human race into darkness, madness and death.

But that's not all. The shocking news is that "becoming a Christian" doesn't cure you from pride - if anything it can make you worse because you think you've arrived and know better than everyone else, and often you do, but somehow - God's grace becomes an excuse for boasting rather than humility. *"God thinks I'm special!! - more special than...!!"* The heart goes bad with pride on the inside whilst maintaining a veneer of humble respectability on the outside. This kind of pride starts with false humility - saying our great acts of service were nothing so that people disagree and compliment us.

If any human could have overcome pride then King Solomon, the author of Proverbs, was that guy. Blessed by God with unimaginable riches, unmatched political power, incredible health, and wisdom dripping from his lips, the like of which had never been heard before, you would have thought that Solomon, in gratitude for all of this, would have remained humbly faithful to the God who had blessed him so much, but unfortunately, the opposite was true - he exalted himself in pride and turned away to idolatry. (Compare Deuteronomy 17:16-18 with 1 Kings 10:14, 10:26 and 11:1-8.)

If Solomon, in all his wisdom, could not overcome human nature, then what hope is there for the rest of us? Praise God there is one who has done it for us. Jesus Christ, the God who is eternally gentle and humble in heart like his Father (Matthew 11:29), stooped low to bare our shame, all our foolish pride, all the wrath of the Father, the Son and the Spirit and who humbly and gloriously welcomes us back into the life of God, not rubbing our noses in it, but rather overjoyed that he can share all that he is and has with us. Who dares attempt to be proud in the face of this?

Ask the Spirit to give you an attitude that is the same as this humble yet awesome Jesus and walk in all of his commands. Memorise Philippians 2:6-12 and preach it to yourself when you see bad pride rising in you, tempting you to ignore the rules that you should follow. Be ruthless in making yourself submit to what God (or God appointed earthly authorities) has commanded.

Questions to choose from:

Last two questions are the most important.

1. Are you proud of your humility? ;-)
2. Have you or someone you know had a Reading Tip moment, like the one Richard described on Sunday?
3. What good things are you proud of? When does appropriate pride turn into bad pride?
4. When it comes to bad pride, do you tend towards arrogance or self-pity?
5. Why do we value our own opinions above what an all loving and wise God has commanded?
6. What do think of the statement "Pride is not just a refusal to listen to and receive truth - it is choosing to deceive yourself?"
7. What do you read into Solomon's turn from God to idolatry? What does it say about him? What do you learn from the incident?
8. *How does Jesus' love and humility kill your pride? (See Philippians 2:6-12)*
9. *How do you follow Jesus' example without becoming proud?*

Pray for God to change your heart.