

# THE ONE SIN NEVER CONFESSED

BY DR. JERRY VINES

*By the Book*™ A Chapter by Chapter Bible Study  
Series from Jerry Vines Ministries  
2295 Towne Lake Parkway  
Suite 116 #249  
Woodstock, GA 30189

## Let's Begin

*Ben Franklin had a knack for personal piety. He recorded in a binder the numerous virtues he slavishly pursued, vowing to work on them weekly. Each day he noted every "defect" in himself. As he made "progress" in virtuous living, he discovered yet another defect—pride. Of pride—his new-found enemy—Franklin discovered, "Disguise it. Struggle with it. Stifle it. Mortify it as much as one pleases. It is still alive, and will every now and then peep out and show itself...even if I could conceive that I had completely overcome it, I should probably be proud of my humility."*

*Spiritual pride is the one sin rarely (if ever) confessed by believers. Yet pride is an inescapable reality of our experience. Pride is also a condition God holds in unseemly esteem, "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil: pride, and arrogance, and the evil way, and the froward mouth, do I hate" (Prov. 8:13).*

*Earlier still, in the catalog of detestable things toward which God revealed His severe displeasure was pride. Indeed pride was at the front of the pack, "These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proudÉ look..." (Prov. 6:16-17a). God's vocal displeasure on visible display may partly account for our subtle aversion to admitting our obsession with pride.*

*For Paul, however, the warnings of Scripture were not posted to be ignored. Instead, we must urgently heed them and seek the help of the Lord. Chapter four teaches us how to deal with spiritual pride. Hence, as we journey through the fourth chapter, let's observe the following outline:*

- I. We Must Learn to Discern Pride (vv. 1-5)**
- II. We Must Learn to Dissuade Pride (vv. 6-15)**
- III. We Must Learn to Dissolve Pride (vv. 15-21)**

## I. We Must Learn to Discern Pride (vv. 1-5)

The first step in understanding pride is knowing how to detect it. With that in mind, observe the Apostle's words, "Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (vv. 1-2). The problem with Corinth was not that they failed to understand what a personal appraisal was. Rather they failed to consider themselves in the appraisal. In other words, they were too busy criticizing everybody else! Some people seem obsessed with judging other people but never considering whether they should personally evaluate their own behavior. Why? Could it be a matter of spiritual pride?

Paul challenged the Corinthians how to regard the ministry. Leaders should be "accounted" as "ministers of Christ" and "stewards" of God's "mysteries." If the ministers live obedient lives under the Lordship of Christ, then they report to Him, not them. Hence, godly ministers are considered "faithful stewards." They "manage" God's household. Churches fail today when they issue orders to the Lord's servants rather than allow the Lord's servants to lead God's flock.

In addition, Paul touches on what is required of the ministry. Again, Paul focuses on a single requirement at this juncture—"a man be found faithful" (v. 2). Dependability is no option for God's servants. Pride can sabotage our trustworthiness by demanding others to surrender to our cause and our goals. We may get the wrong sense that we are better than others, or that our judgment cannot be wrong.

Furthermore, Paul makes clear where the ministry is reviewed. He writes, "But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged



**Reflection Connection**

*Explain how you deal with pride in your personal life. Be as honest as you know how. What is the difference between pride and confidence? Be prepared to explore the differences during group time.*

of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God" (vv. 3-5).

Neither human judgment in general nor personal judgment in particular is infallible. We may be either too hard on ourselves or entirely too soft. Also, others' estimations of us as well as we of them is just as fickle. Hence, while we should listen to evaluations on this level, nothing is final.

On the other hand, God's judgment is sure. It cannot be wrong. Paul says, "he that judgeth me is the Lord." And, the Lord's judgment is impeccable, exposing "the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." God's appraisal is always correct and just, leading inevitably to glory and the "praise of God." There is no place for spiritual pride in the life of any believer, much less the leaders of His flock.

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**II. We Must Learn to Dissuade Pride (vv. 6-15)**

Once we have discerned the presence of pride in our lives, we must deal with pride the way Scripture deals with pride. And, that means we cannot go easy on it. Dealing with spiritual pride will require us to become selfless. In fact, selfishness can thwart our victory over pride. A.W. Tozer wrote, "Self-will is a close relative of pride, and it will form a cloud that can hide the face of God." Tozer was correct: the twin sins of pride and self-will hide God's face from us, hindering us from living close to the Lord Jesus.

Paul spoke of the possibility of becoming "puffed up" in our relationships with one another. He wrote, "And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of *men* above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another" (v. 6). Hence, the Apostle admonished the Corinthians, warning them to deal adequately with spiritual pride before it could poison their fellowship.

First, the proud attitude must be *rejected*. Paul judges pride as unscriptural and unspiritual. Note his series of rhetorical questions, "For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?" (v. 7). While we are all different, we all bear the same Creator and Sustainer. Why, then should any one of them be "puffed up" toward the other? To do so is Biblically inhospitable (v. 8).

Second, the proud attitude must be *reflected*. Paul continues, "For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we

**Reflection Connection**

*What do you think of when you think of being a "fool"? How is being a "fool for Christ's sake" different from the normal way we think of "fools"? Explain.*



are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men. We *are* fools for Christ's sake, but ye *are* wise in Christ; we *are* weak, but ye *are* strong; ye *are* honourable, but we *are* despised" (vv. 9-10). The Christian life is meant to be something quite different from the world. Hence, being "fools for Christ's sake" implied personal humility, not personal pride.

Also, a personal *renunciation* is required, "Being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, *and are* the offscouring of all things unto this day" (v. 13). For Paul, only the picture of the crucified life lived out everyday, did justice to the name Christian. Finally, a personal *annihilation* could not be avoided if pride was to die in one's life. Paul gladly becomes the "offscouring of all things" if only Christ could be magnified. Were Christians today more concerned about the glory of Christ, pride's stronghold could be broken.

### III. We Must Learn to Dissolve Pride (vv. 15-21)

Once we have detected spiritual pride and directed our energies to hear God's admonition, calling it what it is—sin before Him—our privilege is to receive the affirmation, love and forgiveness the Lord offers to us. Easily one discerns Paul's change of tone in these verses. It's almost as if we can see tears well up in the Apostle's eyes at this point. Hear him, "Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. For the kingdom of God *is* not in word, but in power. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and *in* the spirit of meekness?" (vv. 18-21)

Paul desires to know whether he should come with a big stick to clobber them or a pillow of love to encourage them. Of course, he knows the church in Corinth is filled with genuine believers even if some among them were "puffed up." His heart longs to come before them with a spirit of meekness.

Pride is a despicable sin which provokes Scripture to make the strongest possible images concerning the way God feels about it—He *hates* it (cp. Prov. 6:16-17; 8:13). Nevertheless, God loves His people more and desires to cleanse them from all sin, including the sin of pride (cp. 1 John 1:9).

As Paul affirms the Corinthians, exhorting them to look to the future, he woos them to consider two undeniable realities concerning their relationship to God.

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### Reflection Connection

*Think of the last person you led to the Lord. Do you consider him/her a child in the faith? Are you a spiritual father (or mother) to him/her? Do you take your role as a spiritual parent seriously? Does your church?*

First, they were to remember their *birth* in Christ. Paul writes, “For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet *have ye* not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me” (vv. 15-16).

On the one hand, Paul had talked to them as an instructor would talk to his students—a *disciplinarian*. They must hear the truth. Indeed there would be no advancement in the spiritual life unless truth undergirded everything they did. No Christian can grow in faith if faith is in doubt. And, the only way to squeeze doubt out is to build on truth.

On the other hand, Paul now must approach the Corinthians, not as a teacher, but as a father (v. 15). The Corinthians were Paul’s children in the faith, spiritual offspring from his sharing the Gospel and their being born again. Every time a Christian wins a person to Christ, the person, as it were, becomes a child in the faith. Consequently, there is a real sense in which spiritual fathers are responsible to their spiritual children. Fathers must be good role models, stellar moral examples, and inquisitive students of the Bible. Spiritual fathers must pray for their offspring, nurturing them in the faith, leading them to growth and maturity, especially to the point of producing offspring themselves.

Furthermore, no one ever enters the faith “puffed up” or with an arrogant spirit. Humility must characterize the child of God. Indeed only the humble heart can ever experience true conversion (cp. Matt. 18:1). Maintaining a life of spiritual humility is the goal of every believer.

Second, they were to remember their *behavior* in Christ. Once again, Paul is very clear, “For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church” (v. 17). Pride had caused so much division in the church, they had forgotten their direction. Paul exhorts them to heed Timothy who would remind them of his ways in Christ. Is it possible to forget how to live the Christian life? Yes! The Corinthians had forgotten and Paul was sending Timothy to remind them!

The Apostle Peter similarly spoke of our behavior in Christ. He wrote, “Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of *you* be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble” (1 Pet. 5:5). Like Paul, Peter exhorted believers to be clothed with humility, resisting with all their might, the garments of pride. For only the humble in spirit would be approved by God.

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### Golden Greek Nugget

Paul mentioned some in verse 18 as being “puffed up.” Only seven times is this term used in the New Testament, all of which are Paul’s, and only one of which is not found in 1 Corinthians (4:6, 18, 19; 5:2; 8:1; 13:4; Col. 2:18). The Greek term is “phusioo” and it literally means “to inflate” or “to blow up” in the same sense we speak today of “inflating” tires or “blowing up” balloons. Paul’s colorful image is of the proud Christian who is bloated with excess opinions about himself or herself. Only the Christian who is humbly filled with Christ, not selfish, inflated pride, is the believer who pleases God.

### Wrap Up

*D. L. Moody once said, “I believe firmly that the moment our hearts are emptied of pride and selfishness and ambition and everything that is contrary to God’s law, the Holy Spirit will fill every corner of our hearts. But if we are full of pride and conceit and ambition and the world, there is no room for the Spirit of God. We must be emptied before we can be filled.”*

*Is your heart filled with selfish pride turned toward yourself or selfless praise turned toward God? Recall God’s view of pride, not a pretty picture. Yet, do not fail to remember the God we serve, the God to Whom we’ve surrendered our lives, is a God of mercy, forgiveness, and grace. He desires to fill your heart with the riches of His presence if only you will look to Him.*

