

Beware of Pride

Ezra Taft Benson, Ensign, May 1989
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My beloved brethren and sisters, I rejoice to be with you in another glorious general conference of the Church. How grateful I am for the love, prayers, and service of the devoted members of the Church throughout the world.

The Book of Mormon Messages Were Written for Us

May I commend you faithful Saints who are striving to flood the earth and your lives with the Book of Mormon. Not only must we move forward in a monumental manner more copies of the Book of Mormon, but we must move boldly forward into our own lives and throughout the earth more of its marvelous messages.

This sacred volume was written for us—for our day. Its scriptures are to be likened unto ourselves. (See 1 Ne. 19:23.)

The Sin of Pride is a Major Message of the Book of Mormon

The Doctrine and Covenants tells us that the Book of Mormon is the “record of a fallen people.” (D&C 20:9.) Why did they fall? This is one of the major messages of the Book of Mormon. Mormon gives the answer in the closing chapters of the book in these words: “Behold, the pride of this nation, or the people of the Nephites, hath proven their destruction.” (Moro. 8:27.)

And then, lest we miss that momentous Book of Mormon message from that fallen people, the Lord warns us in the Doctrine and Covenants, “Beware of pride, lest ye become as the Nephites of old.” (D&C 38:39.) *Three times in the Doctrine and Covenants the Lord uses the phrase “beware of pride,” including a warning to the second elder of the Church, Oliver Cowdery, and to Emma Smith, the wife of the Prophet. (D&C 23:1; see also D&C 25:14; D&C 38:39.)*

I earnestly seek an interest in your faith and prayers as I strive to bring forth light on this Book of Mormon message—the sin of pride. This message has been weighing heavily on my soul for some time. I know the Lord wants this message delivered now.

What IS Pride?

Pride is a very misunderstood sin, and many are sinning in

ignorance. (See Mosiah 3:11; 3 Ne. 6:18.) In the scriptures there is no such thing as righteous pride—it is always considered a sin. Therefore, no matter how the world uses the term, we must understand how God uses the term so we can understand the language of holy writ and profit thereby. (See 2 Ne. 4:15; Mosiah 1:3–7; Alma 5:61.)

Most of us think of pride as self-centeredness, conceit, boastfulness, arrogance, or haughtiness. All of these are elements of the sin, but the heart, or core, is still missing.

The central feature of pride is enmity—enmity toward God and enmity toward our fellowmen. Enmity means “hatred toward, hostility to, or a state of opposition.” It is the power by which Satan wishes to reign over us.

Major Portion #1: Enmity towards God

Pride is essentially competitive in nature. We pit our will against God’s. When we direct our pride toward God, it is in the spirit of “my will and not thine be done.” As Paul said, they “seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ’s.” (Philip. 2:21.)

Our will in competition to God’s will allows desires, appetites, and passions to go unbridled. (See Alma 38:12; 3 Ne. 12:30.)

The proud cannot accept the authority of God giving direction to their lives. (See Hel. 12:6.) They pit their perceptions of truth against God’s great knowledge, their abilities versus God’s priesthood power, their accomplishments against His mighty works.

In the pre-earthly council, Lucifer placed his proposal in competition with the Father’s plan as advocated by Jesus Christ. (See Moses 4:1–3.) He wished to be honored above all others. (See 2 Ne. 24:13.) In short, his prideful desire was to dethrone God. (See D&C 29:36; D&C 76:28.)

Our enmity toward God takes on many labels, such as rebellion, hard-heartedness, stiff-neckedness, unrepentant, puffed up, easily offended, and sign seekers. The proud wish God would agree with them. They aren’t interested in changing their opinions to agree with God’s.

Major Portion #2: Enmity towards Fellowmen

Another major portion of this very prevalent sin of pride is enmity toward our fellowmen. We are tempted daily to elevate ourselves above others and diminish them. (See Hel. 6:17; D&C 58:41.)

The proud make every man their adversary by pitting their intellects, opinions, works, wealth, talents, or any other worldly measuring device against others. In the words of C. S. Lewis: "Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. ... It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition has gone, pride has gone." (Mere Christianity, New York: Macmillan, 1952, pp. 109–10.)

Some prideful people are not so concerned as to whether their wages meet their needs as they are that their wages are more than someone else's. Their reward is being a cut above the rest. This is the enmity of pride.

Pride is a sin that can readily be seen in others but is rarely admitted in ourselves. Most of us consider pride to be a sin of those on the top, such as the rich and the learned, looking down at the rest of us. (See 2 Ne. 9:42.) There is, however, a far more common ailment among us—and that is pride from the bottom looking up. It is manifest in so many ways, such as faultfinding, gossiping, backbiting, murmuring, living beyond our means, envying, coveting, withholding gratitude and praise that might lift another, and being unforgiving and jealous.

Scriptural Evidences of the Severe Consequences of Pride

The scriptures abound with evidences of the severe consequences of the sin of pride to individuals, groups, cities, and nations. "Pride goeth before destruction." (Prov. 16:18.) It destroyed the Nephite nation and the city of Sodom. (See Moro. 8:27; Ezek. 16:49–50.)

In the premortal council, it was pride that felled Lucifer, "a son of the morning." (2 Ne. 24:12–15; see also D&C 76:25–27; Moses 4:3.)

It was through pride that Christ was crucified. The Pharisees were wroth because Jesus claimed to be the Son of God, which was a threat to their position, and so they plotted His death. (See John 11:53.)

Saul became an enemy to David through pride. He was jealous because the crowds of Israelite women were singing

that "Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands." (1 Sam. 18:6–8.)

King Noah was about to free the prophet Abinadi, but an appeal to his pride by his wicked priests sent Abinadi to the flames. (See Mosiah 17:11–12.) Herod sorrowed at the request of his wife to behead John the Baptist. But his prideful desire to look good to "them which sat with him at meat" caused him to kill John. (Matt. 14:9; see also Mark 6:26.)

Pride results in secret combinations which are built up to get power, gain, and glory of the world. (See Hel. 7:5; Ether 8:9, 16, 22–23; Moses 5:31.) This fruit of the sin of pride, namely secret combinations, brought down both the Jaredite and the Nephite civilizations and has been and will yet be the cause of the fall of many nations. (See Ether 8:18–25.)

At the end of this world, when God cleanses the earth by fire, the proud will be burned as stubble and the meek shall inherit the earth. (See 3 Ne. 12:5, 3 Ne. 25:1; D&C 29:9; JS—H 1:37; Mal. 4:1.)

Pride Skews Our Relationships with God and Fellowman

Pride adversely affects all our relationships—our relationship with God and His servants, between husband and wife, parent and child, employer and employee, teacher and student, and all mankind. Our degree of pride determines how we treat our God and our brothers and sisters. Christ wants to lift us to where He is. Do we desire to do the same for others?

Pride fades our feelings of sonship to God and brotherhood to man. It separates and divides us by "ranks," according to our "riches" and our "chances for learning." (3 Ne. 6:12.) Unity is impossible for a proud people, and unless we are one we are not the Lord's. (See Mosiah 18:21; D&C 38:27; D&C 105:2–4; Moses 7:18.)

Pride Causes us to Misplace the Source of Our Self-Esteem

The proud stand more in fear of men's judgment than of God's judgment. (See D&C 3:6–7; D&C 30:1–2; D&C 60:2.) "What will men think of me?" weighs heavier than "What will God think of me?"

Fear of men's judgment manifests itself in competition for men's approval. The proud love "the praise of men more than the praise of God." (John 12:42–43.) Our motives for the things we do are where the sin is manifest. Jesus said He did "always those things" that pleased God. (John 8:29.)

Would we not do well to have the pleasing of God as our motive rather than to try to elevate ourselves above our brother and outdo another?

When pride has a hold on our hearts, we lose our independence of the world and deliver our freedoms to the bondage of men's judgment. The world shouts louder than the whisperings of the Holy Ghost. The reasoning of men overrides the revelations of God, and the proud let go of the iron rod. (See 1 Ne. 8:19–28; 1 Ne. 11:25; 1 Ne. 15:23–24.)

The proud depend upon the world to tell them whether they have value or not. Their self-esteem is determined by where they are judged to be on the ladders of worldly success. They feel worthwhile as individuals if the numbers beneath them in achievement, talent, beauty, or intellect are large enough. Pride is ugly. It says, "If you succeed, I am a failure."

If we love God, do His will, and fear His judgment more than men's, we will have self-esteem.

Common Faces of Pride

Disobedience is essentially a prideful power struggle against someone in authority over us. It can be a parent, a priesthood leader, a teacher, or ultimately God. A proud person hates the fact that someone is above him. He thinks this lowers his position.

Selfishness is one of the more common faces of pride. "How everything affects me" is the center of all that matters—self-conceit, self-pity, worldly self-fulfillment, self-gratification, and self-seeking.

Another face of pride is contention. Arguments, fights, unrighteous dominion, generation gaps, divorces, spouse abuse, riots, and disturbances all fall into this category of pride.

Contention in our families drives the Spirit of the Lord away. It also drives many of our family members away. Contention ranges from a hostile spoken word to worldwide conflicts. The scriptures tell us that "only by pride cometh contention." (Prov. 13:10; see also Prov. 28:25.)

The scriptures testify that the proud are easily offended and hold grudges. (See 1 Ne. 16:1–3.) They withhold forgiveness to keep another in their debt and to justify their injured feelings.

The proud do not receive counsel or correction easily. (See Prov. 15:10; Amos 5:10.) Defensiveness is used by them to

justify and rationalize their frailties and failures. (See Matt. 3:9; John 6:30–59.)

Pride is a damning sin in the true sense of that word. It limits or stops progression. (See Alma 12:10–11.) The proud are not easily taught. (See 1 Ne. 15:3, 7–11.) They won't change their minds to accept truths, because to do so implies they have been wrong.

The Costs of Pride

Think of what pride has cost us in the past and what it is now costing us in our own lives, our families, and the Church.

Think of the repentance that could take place with lives changed, marriages preserved, and homes strengthened, if pride did not keep us from confessing our sins and forsaking them. (See D&C 58:43.)

Think of the many who are less active members of the Church because they were offended and their pride will not allow them to forgive or fully sup at the Lord's table.

Think of the tens of thousands of additional young men and couples who could be on missions except for the pride that keeps them from yielding their hearts unto God. (See Alma 10:6; Hel. 3:34–35.)

Think how temple work would increase if the time spent in this godly service were more important than the many prideful pursuits that compete for our time.

The Universal Sin

Pride affects all of us at various times and in various degrees. Now you can see why the building in Lehi's dream that represents the pride of the world was large and spacious and great was the multitude that did enter into it. (See 1 Ne. 8:26, 33; 1 Ne. 11:35–36.)

Pride is the universal sin, the great vice. Yes, pride is the universal sin, the great vice.

Pride's Antidote

The antidote for pride is humility—meekness, submissiveness. (See Alma 7:23.) It is the broken heart and contrite spirit. (See 3 Ne. 9:20; 3 Ne. 12:19; D&C 20:37; D&C 59:8; Ps. 34:18; Isa. 57:15; Isa. 66:2.)

As Rudyard Kipling put it so well:

The tumult and the shouting dies;
The captains and the kings depart.
Still stands thine ancient sacrifice,
An humble and a contrite heart.
Lord God of Hosts, be with us yet,
Lest we forget, lest we forget.
(Hymns, 1985, no. 80.)

Let's Choose to Be Humble

God will have a humble people. Either we can choose to be humble or we can be compelled to be humble. Alma said, "Blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble." (Alma 32:16.)

Let us choose to be humble.

How Can We Choose to Be Humble?

We can choose to humble ourselves by conquering enmity toward our brothers and sisters, esteeming them as ourselves, and lifting them as high or higher than we are. (See D&C 38:24; D&C 81:5; D&C 84:106.)

We can choose to humble ourselves by receiving counsel and chastisement. (See Jacob 4:10; Hel. 15:3; D&C 63:55; D&C 101:4–5; D&C 108:1; D&C 124:61, 84; D&C 136:31; Prov. 9:8.)

We can choose to humble ourselves by forgiving those who have offended us. (See 3 Ne. 13:11, 14; D&C 64:10.)

We can choose to humble ourselves by rendering selfless service. (See Mosiah 2:16–17.)

We can choose to humble ourselves by going on missions and preaching the word that can humble others. (See Alma 4:19; Alma 31:5; Alma 48:20.)

We can choose to humble ourselves by getting to the temple more frequently.

We can choose to humble ourselves by confessing and forsaking our sins and being born of God. (See D&C 58:43; Mosiah 27:25–26; Alma 5:7–14, 49.)

We can choose to humble ourselves by loving God, submitting our will to His, and putting Him first in our lives. (See 3 Ne. 11:11; 3 Ne. 13:33; Moro. 10:32.)

Let us choose to be humble. We can do it. I know we can.

We LDS must Conquer Pride to Fulfill our Divine Destiny of Building Zion

My dear brethren and sisters, we must prepare to redeem Zion. It was essentially the sin of pride that kept us from establishing Zion in the days of the Prophet Joseph Smith. It was the same sin of pride that brought consecration to an end among the Nephites. (See 4 Ne. 1:24–25.)

Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion. I repeat: Pride is the great stumbling block to Zion.

We must cleanse the inner vessel by conquering pride. (See Alma 6:2–4; Matt. 23:25–26.)

We must yield "to the enticings of the Holy Spirit," put off the prideful "natural man," become "a saint through the atonement of Christ the Lord," and become "as a child, submissive, meek, humble." (Mosiah 3:19; see also Alma 13:28.)

That we may do so and go on to fulfill our divine destiny is my fervent prayer in the name of Jesus Christ, amen.

* Editor's Note: I believe this talk is perhaps the most important General Conference talk of the last 50 years. I have studied and pondered it over and over again, gleaning gospel truths from it that are most precious to me. My edits here are restricted to adding section headings, and, moving the italicized passages to those sections that, in my opinion, best match their subject matter. All of these changes were made to help readers better understand President Benson's vital message.