

Pride and the Priesthood

Dieter F. Uchtdorf

Second Counselor in the First Presidency

October 2010 General Conference

Pride is a switch that turns off priesthood power.

Humility is a switch that turns it on.

My dear brothers, thank you for assembling all around the world for this priesthood session of general conference. Your presence shows your commitment to stand, wherever you are, with your brothers who bear the holy priesthood and serve and honor your Lord and Redeemer, Jesus Christ.

Often we mark the span of our lives by events that leave imprints on our minds and hearts. There are many such events in my life, one of which happened in 1989 when I heard a timeless sermon by President Ezra Taft Benson, “Beware of Pride.” In the introduction it was noted that this topic had been weighing heavily on President Benson’s soul for some time.¹

I have felt a similar burden during the past months. The promptings of the Holy Spirit have urged me to add my voice as another witness to President Benson’s message delivered 21 years ago.

Every mortal has at least a casual if not intimate relationship with the sin of pride. No one has avoided it; few overcome it. When I told my wife that this would be the topic of my talk, she smiled and said, “It is so good that you talk about things you know so much about.”

Other Meanings of Pride

I also remember one interesting side effect of President Benson’s influential talk. For a while it almost became taboo among Church members to say that they were “proud” of their children or their country or that they took “pride” in their work. The very word *pride* seemed to become an outcast in our vocabulary.

In the scriptures we find plenty of examples of good and righteous people who rejoice in righteousness and at the same time glory in the goodness of God. Our Heavenly Father Himself introduced His Beloved Son with the words “in whom I am well pleased.”²

Alma gloried in the thought that he might “be an instrument in the hands of God.”³ The Apostle Paul gloried in the faithfulness of members of the Church.⁴ The great missionary Ammon gloried in the success he and his brothers had experienced as missionaries.⁵

I believe there is a difference between being proud of certain things and being prideful. I am proud of many things. I am proud of my wife. I am proud of our children and grandchildren.

I am proud of the youth of the Church, and I rejoice in their goodness. I am proud of you, my dear and faithful brethren. I am proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with you as a bearer of the holy priesthood of God.

Pride Is the Sin of Self-Elevation

So what is the difference between this kind of feeling and the pride that President Benson called “the universal sin”?⁶ Pride is sinful, as President Benson so memorably taught, because it breeds hatred or hostility and places us in opposition to God and our fellowmen. At its core, pride is a sin of comparison, for though it usually begins with “Look how wonderful I am and

what great things I have done,” it always seems to end with “Therefore, I am better than you.”

When our hearts are filled with pride, we commit a grave sin, for we violate the two great commandments.⁷ Instead of worshipping God and loving our neighbor, we reveal the real object of our worship and love—the image we see in the mirror.

Pride is the great sin of self-elevation. It is for so many a personal Rameumptom, a holy stand that justifies envy, greed, and vanity.⁸ In a sense, pride is the original sin, for before the foundations of this earth, pride felled Lucifer, a son of the morning “who was in authority in the presence of God.”⁹ If pride can corrupt one as capable and promising as this, should we not examine our own souls as well?

Pride Has Many Faces

Pride is a deadly cancer. It is a gateway sin that leads to a host of other human weaknesses. In fact, it could be said that every other sin is, in essence, a manifestation of pride.

This sin has many faces. It leads some to revel in their own perceived self-worth, accomplishments, talents, wealth, or position. They count these blessings as evidence of being “chosen,” “superior,” or “more righteous” than others. This is the sin of “Thank God I am more special than you.” At its core is the desire to be admired or envied. It is the sin of self-glorification.

For others, pride turns to envy: they look bitterly at those who have better positions, more talents, or greater possessions than they do. They seek to hurt, diminish, and tear down others in a misguided and unworthy attempt at self-elevation. When those they envy stumble or suffer, they secretly cheer.

The Laboratory of Sports

Perhaps there is no better laboratory to observe the sin of pride than the world of sports. I have always loved participating in and attending sporting events. But I confess there are times when the lack of civility in sports is embarrassing. How is it that normally kind and compassionate human beings can be so intolerant and filled with hatred toward an opposing team and its fans?

I have watched sports fans vilify and demonize their rivals. They look for any flaw and magnify it. They justify their hatred with broad generalizations and apply them to everyone associated with the other team. When ill fortune afflicts their rival, they rejoice.

Brethren, unfortunately we see today too often the same kind of attitude and behavior spill over into the public discourse of politics, ethnicity, and religion.

My dear brethren of the priesthood, my beloved fellow disciples of the gentle Christ, should we not hold ourselves to a higher standard? As priesthood bearers, we must realize that all of God’s children wear the same jersey. Our team is the brotherhood of man. This mortal life is our playing field. Our goal is to learn to love God and to extend that same love toward our fellowman. We are here to live according to His law and establish the kingdom of God. We are here to build, uplift, treat fairly, and encourage all of Heavenly Father’s children.

We Must Not Inhale

When I was called as a General Authority, I was blessed to be tutored by many of the senior Brethren in the Church. One day I had the opportunity to drive President James E. Faust to a stake

conference. During the hours we spent in the car, President Faust took the time to teach me some important principles about my assignment. He explained also how gracious the members of the Church are, especially to General Authorities. He said, "They will treat you very kindly. They will say nice things about you." He laughed a little and then said, "Dieter, be thankful for this. But don't you ever inhale it."

That is a good lesson for us all, brethren, in any calling or life situation. We can be grateful for our health, wealth, possessions, or positions, but when we begin to inhale it—when we become obsessed with our status; when we focus on our own importance, power, or reputation; when we dwell upon our public image and believe our own press clippings—that's when the trouble begins; that's when pride begins to corrupt.

There are plenty of warnings about pride in the scriptures: "Only by pride cometh contention: but with the well advised is wisdom."¹⁰

The Apostle Peter warned that "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble."¹¹ Mormon explained, "None is acceptable before God, save the meek and lowly in heart."¹² And by design, the Lord chooses "the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty."¹³ The Lord does this to show that His hand is in His work, lest we "trust in the arm of flesh."¹⁴

We are servants of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We are not given the priesthood so that we can take our bows and bask in praise. We are here to roll up our sleeves and go to work. We are enlisted in no ordinary task. We are called to prepare the world for the coming of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. We seek not our own honor but give praise and glory to God. We know that the contribution we can make by ourselves is small; nevertheless, as we exercise the power of the priesthood in righteousness, God can cause a great and marvelous work to come forth through our efforts. We must learn, as Moses did, that "man is nothing"¹⁵ by himself but that "with God all things are possible."¹⁶

Jesus Christ Is the Perfect Example of Humility

In this, as in all things, Jesus Christ is our perfect example. Whereas Lucifer tried to change the Father's plan of salvation and obtain honor for himself, the Savior said, "Father, thy will be done, and the glory be thine forever."¹⁷ Despite His magnificent abilities and accomplishments, the Savior was always meek and humble.

Brethren, we hold "the Holy Priesthood, after the Order of the Son of God."¹⁸ It is the power God has granted to men on earth to act for Him. In order to exercise His power, we must strive to be like the Savior. This means that in all things we seek to do the will of the Father, just as the Savior did.¹⁹ It means that we give all glory to the Father, just as the Savior did.²⁰ It means that we lose ourselves in the service of others, just as the Savior did.

Pride is a switch that turns off priesthood power.²¹ Humility is a switch that turns it on.

Be Humble and Full of Love

So how do we conquer this sin of pride that is so prevalent and so damaging? How do we become more humble?

It is almost impossible to be lifted up in pride when our hearts are filled with charity. "No one can assist in this work except he shall

be humble and full of love."²² When we see the world around us through the lens of the pure love of Christ, we begin to understand humility.

Some suppose that humility is about beating ourselves up. Humility does not mean convincing ourselves that we are worthless, meaningless, or of little value. Nor does it mean denying or withholding the talents God has given us. We don't discover humility by thinking less *of* ourselves; we discover humility by thinking less *about* ourselves. It comes as we go about our work with an attitude of serving God and our fellowman.

Humility directs our attention and love toward others and to Heavenly Father's purposes. Pride does the opposite. Pride draws its energy and strength from the deep wells of selfishness. The moment we stop obsessing with ourselves and lose ourselves in service, our pride diminishes and begins to die.

My dear brethren, there are so many people in need whom we could be thinking about instead of ourselves. And please don't ever forget your own family, your own wife. There are so many ways we could be serving. We have no time to become absorbed in ourselves.

I once owned a pen that I loved to use during my career as an airline captain. By simply turning the shaft, I could choose one of four colors. The pen did not complain when I wanted to use red ink instead of blue. It did not say to me, "I would rather not write after 10:00 p.m., in heavy fog, or at high altitudes." The pen did not say, "Use me only for important documents, not for the daily mundane tasks." With greatest reliability it performed every task I needed, no matter how important or insignificant. It was always ready to serve.

In a similar way we are tools in the hands of God. When our heart is in the right place, we do not complain that our assigned task is unworthy of our abilities. We gladly serve wherever we are asked. When we do this, the Lord can use us in ways beyond our understanding to accomplish His work.

Let me conclude with words from President Ezra Taft Benson's inspired message of 21 years ago:

"Pride *is* the great stumbling block to Zion.

"We must cleanse the inner vessel by conquering pride. ..."²³

"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.' ..."²⁴

"God will have a humble people. ... 'Blessed are they who humble themselves without being compelled to be humble.' ..."²⁵

"Let us choose to be humble. We can do it. I know we can."²⁶

My beloved brethren, let us follow the example of our Savior and reach out to serve rather than seeking the praise and honor of men. It is my prayer that we will recognize and root out unrighteous pride in our hearts and that we will replace it with "righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, [and] meekness."²⁷ In the sacred name of Jesus Christ, amen.

Notes

1. See Ezra Taft Benson, "Beware of Pride," *Ensign*, May 1989, 4
2. 3 Nephi 11:7.

3. Alma 29:9.
4. See 2 Thessalonians 1:4.
5. See Alma 26.
6. Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, May 1989, 6.
7. See Matthew 22:36–40.
8. See Alma 31:21.
9. Doctrine and Covenants 76:25.
10. Proverbs 13:10.
11. 1 Peter 5:5.
12. Moroni 7:44.
13. 1 Corinthians 1:27.
14. Doctrine and Covenants 1:19.
15. Moses 1:10.
16. Matthew 19:26.
17. See Moses 4:1–2.
18. Doctrine and Covenants 107:3.
19. See John 8:28–29.
20. See John 17:4.
21. See Doctrine and Covenants 121:34–37.
22. Doctrine and Covenants 12:8.
23. See Alma 6:2–4; Matthew 23:25–26.
24. Mosiah 3:19; see also Alma 13:28.
25. Alma 32:16.
26. Ezra Taft Benson, *Ensign*, May 1989, 6–7.
27. 1 Timothy 6:11.