

Overcoming Spiritual Arrogance

Travis Wise

“Every saint has a past, and every sinner has a future.” Oscar Wilde, the late-nineteenth century writer who authored *The Picture of Dorian Gray*, was not holy by any means. In fact, it would be fair to say he was pretty debauched. However, I’ve always been fond of this quote due to its succinct spiritual insights.

One of the temptations countless Christians will wrestle with is spiritual arrogance. Other sins of which we are often guilty are the result of our being carried away by our own lusts (i.e. stealing, lying, etc.). Ironically, spiritual arrogance can arise when we *refrain* from succumbing to elementary temptations if it leads us to think of ourselves more than we should. Spiritual arrogance is not inevitably a product of doing good works and refraining from sin -- that would have horrible, contradictory implications if it were so -- but it is a product of thinking we are good, holy, and righteous by our own means. It is a product of us thinking we are good Christians because we don’t do bad things instead of realizing we are good Christians and do good things because the Lord saved us and is living in us.

Spiritual arrogance is problematic for many reasons. Primarily, it separates us from God. If we feel that we are holy by our own means, and not by God’s, we do away with the need of God in our own lives. In Luke 18:9-14, Jesus tells a parable of two men, a Pharisee and a tax collector, who go to the temple to pray. The Pharisee elevated himself above the wretched publican. Sure, he was “thanking” God, but underneath he was merely bragging of his own holiness. And while he was “praying” to God, the Pharisee was basically doing away with his need for God since he considered himself godly enough by his own efforts. The tax collector, however, was “unwilling to lift up his eyes to heaven,” realizing he could do nothing of his own measure and needed the mercy of the Almighty God. Recognizing his own sinfulness and need for God, the tax collector left the temple with a strengthened relationship with, and the blessing of, the Almighty. The example of the penitent publican shows that only by recognizing that we need the Lord can we grow closer *to* the Lord.

If we succumb to spiritual arrogance, it can also become a stumbling block for others. If we are arrogant, acting in a “holier than thou” manner towards others -- forgive the banal cliché -- we present Christianity in a bad light. Instead of emphasizing Christ’s blood that cleanses us, and God’s grace that saves us, haughty Christians risk painting a picture of their own perfection, as if their *works* are what saved them. Of course, we all know that we are saved by Christ’s blood and God’s grace and not by works of our own merit, but how are sinners to know that if we put on an unbecoming attitude?

Moreover, spiritual arrogance dissuades brethren from confessing their sins and seeking the prayers and encouragement of others. If fellow Christians are hung up on how holy they are, asking for help and forgiveness becomes a humiliating affair rather than the liberating feeling it should be. Certainly we should all feel deep shame and guilt for the sins we commit, but we should not be afraid to confess and ask for prayers because we fear the judgment of spiritually arrogant brethren.

Obviously, spiritual arrogance is deleterious to our spiritual welfare. So how do we overcome it? Satan would like us to believe that we should just indulge in sinful acts more lest we become spiritually arrogant. But of course that's a ludicrous notion. The answer lies in depending on, praying to, and thinking about God all the more while forgetting ourselves. Since we have died to sin, it is necessary that we no longer live in it (Romans 6:2), but it is of even greater necessity that we remember who it is working through us: Jesus Christ (Philippians 4:13). Instead of accrediting our good fruits to our own labors, we need to be counted among "the poor in spirit" (Matthew 5:3), realizing that without the perfect blood of Jesus Christ that liberated us from the slavery of sin, we could not be born of God. We should never sin so that grace may abound, but we need to recognize that God once extended His grace so that our past sins may be washed away in baptism. And now I get back to why I used Wilde's quote in the first place. The problem with the spiritually arrogant is that they fail to realize that "all have sinned and fallen short of the glory of God," including themselves (Romans 3:23). As saints who have been redeemed, we must never forget that we all have a sin-filled past. Yes, the Lord graciously forgave us of that past, but if it weren't for that, we would still be living in depravity. Because of this, as long as we are not spiritually arrogant, we have something to boast of other than ourselves: Christ. Jesus Christ was the perfect man who freed us from the bondage of sin and from our less-than-perfect past. Once we realize this, I believe we can turn and look at the world with a bit more hope. Since Christ died for all, and His blood covers all transgressions, then even the most despicable sinner on Earth has a chance to become a shining light to the world through a new life in Him. We all have our pasts, but through Christ we have a future.

This is Faith

Grant Henry

Growing up is tough. No surprise there. I have a sneaking suspicion it doesn't get any easier down the road but all I can vouch for is the twenty two years I've lived so far. I'm about to graduate from college and essentially all I have known up until this point is school. The goal of school, theoretically, is to learn how to do things the right way. Think of your grades as a meter of how right you are accomplishing each task. Each test, quiz, or assignment is a trial for proving how we decide to act, how we decide to apply the rules, or what knowledge we choose to utilize. The structure of younger life is composed of learning how to navigate these proving grounds. Sometimes we rise to meet the challenge and other times, the challenge may rise to defeat us. In these situations, it's easy to get discouraged because we feel our actions, willpower, or decision-making is not sufficient or repeatedly fails to get us through to the other side. However, it's precisely these times where I feel it's easiest to overlook a primary component of our relationship with God. What I'm speaking of here is our *faith* in God. Faith in this context doesn't denote a subconscious belief in the existence of God or a vague awareness that he has "power" to create, heal, will, or whatever else he may deem appropriate (nor should it ever for that matter). Rather, the term faith connotes a living, eternally-persevering, affective presence in our lives that God is real and is a driving force that guides our every move. There is plenty in the scriptures to support the impact this component *should* have on our lives. However, somehow faith gets lost in our thinking when we are struggling with life's curve balls we fail to hit time after time. Paul freely

admits the oppressive nature of sin: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (Rom. 3:23) and that “the wages of sin is death” (Rom. 6:23) as he is “sold under sin” (Rom. 7:14). Repeated failure to keep the precepts we hold true in the scriptures is very disheartening and can lead to self-defeat before any future challenges are even attempted. But read on in Romans 3. From verse 23 we read what we all too often face: “for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” However, we can be “justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is Christ Jesus whom God set forth as a propitiation by his blood, *through faith*, to demonstrate his righteousness...to demonstrate at the present time His righteousness, that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has *faith* in Jesus” (Rom. 3:24-26, emphasis GH). This statement exudes strength and encouragement. One of the major themes of Paul’s letter to the Romans was the fact that they, as imperfect individuals, are convicted by the law because they couldn’t keep it perfectly. Out of God’s love, He created a way for them to still stand justified through faith in Christ Jesus. Are we not in the same boat as the Roman readers?

Stop and consider for a moment the example Paul uses to support this idea of a sustaining faith in the fourth chapter. We read in Genesis 12:1-3 of the three promises that God made to Abraham. Back in Romans, Paul readily identifies how these promises were fulfilled. Verse 16 and following says that “it is of faith that it might be according to grace, so that the promise might be sure to all seed, not only to those who are of the law, but also to those who are of the faith of Abraham, who...in the presence of Him whom he believed – God, who gives life to the dead and calls those things which do not exist as though they did; who, contrary to hope, in hope believed...and not being weak in faith...He did not waver at the promise of God through unbelief, but was strengthened in faith, giving glory to God, and being fully convinced that what He had promised He was able to perform.” If this is the case, we should have a completely different attitude towards the challenges we face. Look at it not as, “What can *I* do to get through this?” but, “How can I rest more fully on *God* who is more than able to sustain ?” Faith is not simply *believing* that God will help when He is needed, but *knowing* that we can act according to the help that He *will* provide.

I still vividly remember the first lesson I took when I began flying. My instructor and I went out to the plane, went through some routine procedures and started the engine. I looked over at him to inquire what he wanted me to do next and he pointed towards the end of the runway and said, “Go fly.” I nervously added some power and taxied to the end of the runway. When it was our turn to takeoff, I looked over at him yet again as if to say, “When are you going to help?” He looked straight ahead and signaled for me to go. So I taxied out, pushed the throttle in and got us airborne. After some time of flying around he pointed back at the airport and told me to head back and “land us.” I swallowed hard, at least I think...my mouth was a bit dry. We entered the pattern, got our clearance and I put us down on a hard surface (I’m pretty sure that it was the right runway). It was quite the experience but think about how different it would have been if, when my instructor had said, “Go fly,” he then hopped out of the plane and watched as a spectator from the sidelines. Quite different would be a politically soft way of stating the gravity of the situation. Instead, he was riding shotgun the whole time, adding inputs without my notice to keep us where we needed to be. I thoroughly enjoyed the experience because I knew that whatever happened, he would be there to support my inadequacies.

I tell that story to make a comparison. God is not a god who tells us to go live our lives and then watches what happens from the sidelines. Instead, He is right there with us, ready to help at every step of the way. But we have to *rely* on His help, we have to *know* that He is there, we have to *live* with Him as a guiding force that can add inputs to keep us where we need to be. This is faith.

God is an all-powerful God who can still be approached with confidence and can be entrusted to answer the call. “Therefore, brethren, having boldness to enter the Holiest by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way which He consecrated for us, through the veil, that is, His flesh, and having a High Priest over the house of God, let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith...Let us hold fast the confession of our hope without wavering, for He who promised is faithful” (Heb. 10:19-23). This is faith.

God is plays a real role in our lives, both now and in the life to come. “...without faith it is impossible to please Him, for he who comes to God must believe that He is, and the He is a rewarder of those who diligently seek him” (Heb. 11:6). This is faith.

Next time you feel down because life’s challenges seem too much too handle or you repeatedly make the same mistakes through sin, keep in mind that there is an important component of our relationship with God that can uphold us through *any* circumstance: our faith in God.

The Equation of Faith

Aaron Lasater

Hebrews 11 gives us a clear picture of what our faith should look like. All the great men listed there are said to have taken some kind of action on account of their faith. This action is commonly called works. In a physics class you might learn that work equals force times distance ($W = F*d$). This physical definition can easily have a spiritual principle applied to it.

As you hopefully already know, zero times anything equals zero. So if we apply a force but go a distance of zero, we do zero work ($W = F * (0); W = 0$). Therefore, we must apply more force until the object moves. For our spiritual application let us equate force with our effort to obey, and let us equate distance with our progression to be Christlike. If we look at ourselves and conclude that we have been trying, but we are not seeing any improvement, then we have not done any work and need to exert an even greater aspiration. If our effort is coming up short, then our work is inadequate, and if our work is inadequate ($W = F * (0); W = 0$) then our faith is flawed (James 2:14-26). But how do we try harder?

If we look at the mathematical definition of force, we find that force equals mass times acceleration ($F = m*a; W = (m*a)*d$). So by enlarging mass, or by boosting acceleration (or both), we can increase force.

Let’s first look at mass. Mass is accumulated matter, so if we want to multiply our “spiritual mass,” we should follow the same steps we would take as if we were to thicken our physical mass. A body builder eats a lot of food. However, he does not eat anything and everything; he eats wholesome, nourishing meals that will allow him to grow the lean muscle he wants. In the

same way we should eat “spiritual food.” That is, digest God’s word (Col. 1:10, 2 Tim. 3:16). A body builder also exercises often. In the same way we should “spiritually exercise.” Reading, studying, and memorizing God’s word equips to defend the truth when the need arises.

Now about acceleration. We are all familiar with the “gas pedal” in our cars (sometimes called an “accelerator”). Acceleration is the change in velocity (v) divided by time (t) ($a = [v \text{ (at the end)} - v \text{ (at the beginning)}] / t$). So let’s say you were driving in town going 35 mph (v (at the beginning) = 35 mph). Once you were out of town you speed up to 70 mph (v (at the end) = 70 mph) and it took you 100 seconds to do so ($t = 100 \text{ seconds} = 0.02778 \text{ hours}$). Your acceleration would be ($a = (70 - 35) / (0.02778)$); $a = 1260$ (miles per hour squared). If it took you even less time ($t = 10 \text{ seconds} = 0.002778 \text{ hours}$) ($a = (70 - 35) / (0.002778)$); $a = 12600$ your acceleration would equal 12,600 (miles per hour squared). You see if you can gain speed in less time, your acceleration will be bigger. Spiritually thinking, let’s suppose our speed (which equals distance divided by time (d/t); distance remember we defined as becoming Christlike) is how much we pray per day. To help us understand, consider this scenario: it took Bob 100 days (t) to make the transfer from praying three times a day (v (at the beginning) = 3) to praying fifteen times a day (v (at the end) = 15) ($a = (15 - 3) / (100) = 0.12$). Bob had a “spiritual acceleration” of 0.12 (prayers per day squared). Tim on the other hand, was a little more devoted. He also went from praying three times a day (v (at the beginning) = 3) to praying fifteen times a day (v (at the end) = 15), but in only 10 days (t) ($a = (15 - 3) / (10) = 1.2$). Tim had the greater “spiritual acceleration” of 1.2 (prayers per day squared), which means he had more “spiritual force,” which hopefully means he could move himself a distance closer to perfection, which means he did good work. My point is that perhaps we could increase the amount of time we spend reading (the Bible), studying (the Bible), praying, giving, reaching others, etc., instead of other things like video games, TV, computer, etc.

It’s often too much of these kinds of diversions that hinder us. In the physical world velocity is defined as not only speed, but also direction. Therefore by changing direction you change your acceleration (so I guess we could call our steering wheels “accelerators” too). Maybe you are turned toward worldly things, either by a lot or by a little, you still are distracted from God. Keep in mind no one can serve two masters (Matt. 6:19-24) either you are for God, or against him.

Another thing to keep in mind is that we should not do these good works to be seen of men (Matt. 6:1-18). We need to always remember this, we do these works for God, not for our own glory (Eph. 2: 8-9). Luke 17:10 states plainly how our attitude should be towards our good works: “So you too, when you do all the things which are commanded you, say, ‘We are unworthy slaves; we have done only that which we ought to have done.’”

I hope this article could be of some encouragement to you. If you have not been working as you should, the time is now (Luke 13:6-9). Maybe you are working, but I’m sure there is more you could do. There is always more time in the day that could be given to God. “The Lord be with your spirit. Grace be with you” (2 Tim. 4:22).