



There is almost nothing more dangerous than a prideful Christian. Believer and unbeliever alike have pride within them but in many ways, a prideful Christian is even more dangerous. The nature of pride is something that is mostly hidden from the person carrying the pride. Other people can often see it, but the prideful person is largely blind to it. Now here's why I say that a prideful Christian is so dangerous. We are dangerous because we tend to hide behind a cloak of spirituality. It's the same reason that false teachers are so dangerous. Since the Bible can be twisted to support almost anything, false teaching continues to spread. The false teachers and their followers back up their false teaching with pious platitudes and twisted Scripture that sounds good. Therefore, their false teaching is hidden behind a cloak of spirituality. It's like laying a beautiful blanket over a tattered piece of furniture. The attractive exterior hides what's underneath. The same thing can happen with prideful believers. They can use the Bible to justify their behavior, emotions and motives and since God is the highest authority to which we can appeal, it becomes extremely difficult to break through this defensive barrier.

In contrast to pride, humility is the slayer of sin. Genuine humility is a powerful weapon that literally vanquishes pride. Jesus' example of washing his disciple's feet is a potent example of teaching and modeling humility.

1 Now before the Feast of the Passover, when Jesus knew that his hour had come to depart out of this world to the Father, having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end.

2 During supper, when the devil had already put it into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him, 3 Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands, and that he had come from God and was going back to God, 4 rose from supper. He laid aside his outer garments, and taking a towel, tied it around his waist. 5 Then he poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel that was wrapped around him.

6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, do you wash my feet?" 7 Jesus answered him, "What I am doing you do not understand now, but afterward you will understand." 8 Peter said to him, "You shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered him, "If I do not wash you, you have no share with me." 9 Simon Peter said to him, "Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!" 10 Jesus said to him, "The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was to betray him; that was why he said, "Not all of you are clean."

12 When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? 13 You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. 14 If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. 15 For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you. 16 Truly, truly, I say to you, a servant is not greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 If you know these things, blessed are you if you do them. 18 I am not speaking of all of you; I know whom I have chosen. But the Scripture will be fulfilled, ‘He who ate my bread has lifted his heel against me.’ 19 I am telling you this now, before it takes place, that when it does take place you may believe that I am he. 20 Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever receives the one I send receives me, and whoever receives me receives the one who sent me.”

Humility slays sin because it...

1. **Is fiercely centered on others.**

The act of Jesus washing the feet of his disciples is the centerpiece of this passage. Everything else revolved around it. You no doubt understand that this was about the lowliest task that anyone could perform. It was a common occurrence that servants would wash the feet of guests and remove the dust and dirt from their sandaled feet. Some Jews argued that it was such a dishonorable task that it was too demeaning for even Jewish servants. Only Gentile servants should be forced to perform such a degrading duty.¹

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But Jesus overcame all of those cultural barriers to humble himself as a slave before his disciples. The Creator of the universe knelt down on his hands and knees to wash the filthy feet of ordinary men. This act was fiercely centered on others. After all, what stands in the middle of both pride and sin? “I.” There is much more than merely modeling humble behavior in this passage. But outside of the cross which was just a day away from Jesus’ perspective, this was perhaps his most humble act. And what makes it all the more shocking is that Jesus was the only one in the room who was deserving to be the center of attention because he is Lord.

This is a greater to lesser argument. If Jesus, our Master, Lord and Savior could humble himself in this way, how much more should we do the same. Our resistance to humbling ourselves and clinging to our pride demonstrates our total lack of understanding about what Jesus did.

2. **Brings to mind our justification.**

Brash and bold Peter complained to Jesus. “*You shall never wash my feet.*” Jesus answered him, “*If I do not wash you, you have no share with me.*” The foot washing was a symbol of our ultimate cleansing, which is our justification. Unless we are washed and regenerated by the Holy Spirit, just as Jesus told Peter, we have no share with him.

Jesus demonstrated the ultimate example of humility but humility is also taught by those in the world. I found some really good quotes on pride and humility. “Some people would rather die in their pride, than live in their humility.” This was said poet and author Anthony Liccione. I am not familiar with his work but he listed his major influences as Bob Dylan, Ernest Hemmingway, U2, the Bible and Stephen King. That’s quite an interesting list.

Here's another excellent quote "Pride is concerned with who is right. Humility is concerned with what is right." That was spoken by Ezra Taft Benson, a former president of the Mormon Church.²

My point is giving these two quotes is to illustrate that anyone can learn to be more humble to some degree. Like all character qualities, humility is not the exclusive domain of Christians. However, believers have the greatest motivation and the greatest power in order to do so. Unlike the rest of the world, our humility is gospel-based. We love because he first loved us. We humble ourselves because he first humbled himself. We should seek humility at all costs to demonstrate that apart from the justifying blood of Christ, you and I deserve nothing. There's no entitlement in the Kingdom of God. Even the one who was entitled to glory and praise laid it aside for us.

I'd like to modify the quote from the Mormon president to make it gospel-centered. Mr. Benson rightly pointed it that humility is concerned with what is right but this quote is incomplete because it does not get to our motives, our reasons for doing what is right. I would modify it like this. Humility is doing right thing for the right reasons and leaving the results to God. The right reason is our justification. We are to be humble because Christ's humility resulted in our salvation. Our motives are everything here. We can do the right thing for very selfish reasons. The actions look good on the outside but the motives are dripping with pride. But the gospel changes those actions and motives from the inside out.

Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves (Phil. 2:3).

3. Is a clarion call for unity

I was raised in Ohio and ever since I left the state over thirty years ago, I have yet to meet another Christian who was baptized in the same manner that I was. Every baptism I have ever seen or experienced throughout the world is done by lowering the person backwards into the water and raising them back the same way. Baptism is a symbol of our being united in our death and resurrection with Christ, so baptism by immersion is a powerful symbol of this spiritual reality. The word baptism means immersion and this is how the it was done all throughout the New Testament—believers were baptized by being immersed in a body of water.

My baptism was similar but also unique. I was immersed but instead of being baptized once backward, I was dunked three times forward. I was saved in the Grace Brethren Church and this denomination had always baptized believers three times forward. They refer to it as a "triune immersion." They also practice "three-fold communion" services. The whole event takes several hours. First everyone comes together for a fellowship meal. After the meal, the men and boys go into one room and the women and girls go into another and they was one another's feet. Then everyone gather back together and shares the Lord Supper. Because it is such an involved ceremony, they only do this once per quarter. The vast majority of believers have never experienced a foot washing ceremony. This was a special and unique ceremony. And as far as the baptism went, I did not know any differently so I never questioned why they baptized three times forward instead of one time backward.

I tell you all of this because there is a sad conclusion to the story of this denomination. I was saved in 1980 and baptized a year later but in 1992, the Grace Brethren Church split over their triune baptism and three-fold communion.³ The new denomination called themselves the Conservative Grace Brethren Church. Here is the relevant portion of their statement of faith.⁴

“We believe that only triune immersion and only threefold communion meet the biblical mandates of our Lord Jesus Christ concerning ordinances.”

The key word there is “only.” They took a passage from Jesus life which was descriptive and made it prescriptive. They took something that is important and made it all-important. Here is the relevant portion of the original denomination.

We affirm that Jesus Christ gave ordinances to the church:

Baptism testifies to the reality of our salvation and identifies us as disciples of the Triune God. We therefore encourage the practice of triune immersion.

Communion testifies to our justification, sanctification and glorification, which are accomplished through Jesus Christ. We therefore encourage the practice of these symbols: the bread and cup, the washing of feet and the sharing of a meal.⁵

Did you notice the key word in this statement? The key word is “encourage.” This statement recognizes that triune baptism and threefold communion is a foundation of their history as Grace Brethren worshippers. However, they are not saying that it is the only way to practice these ordinances. In fairness, Jesus did say we should do this. *For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.* However, I believe that Jesus was teaching a principle of humility more than merely a practice of foot-washing.

But the really sad part about this denominational struggle is that this incredible story where Jesus was demonstrating utter humility and teaching all of us to do likewise has been the very cause of fighting and divisiveness. Instead of bringing believers together it has torn them apart. It is the exact opposite of what Jesus intended!

On the night before his crucifixion, in his last act of love, the Messiah knelt down in perfect humility and washed his disciple’s feet, including the one who was about to betray him. As believers, we must build and guard our unity with one another. I was witnessing to a guy this past week and he raised the topic of divisiveness within Christianity. I had to agree with him and most of us know that Viroqua is a horrible example of division in the body of Christ. You need a scoreboard to keep a tally of the church splits and church fights. So here I was trying to witness to an unbeliever while also admitting that we’re really bad at this Christianity thing. What about you? Are you in any way contributing to disunity in the body of Christ? Are you doing anything to build and guard unity?

4. **Affirms our sanctification**—daily cleansing by Christ

9 Simon Peter said to him, “Lord, not my feet only but also my hands and my head!” 10 Jesus said to him, “The one who has bathed does not need to wash, except for his feet, but is completely clean. And you are clean, but not every one of you.”

Jesus' foot-washing demonstrates our one time cleansing—our justification, but also our ongoing cleansing—our sanctification. To use Jesus' words, our bathing is our justification but he said we still need our feet washed. We need regular, routine cleansing through genuine confession and repentance.

Often believers aren't very good at this daily cleansing because they fall into the same error that Peter did. If you have received a bath, all you need is to have your feet washed. But here's what happens all too often. When we sin, we feel really guilty. And we should. There is a place for Godly sorrow. True repentance cannot come without Godly sorrow. But because we fail to grasp our ultimate cleansing we do not pursue our daily cleansing. Our guilt causes us to run away from God instead of toward him. Our guilt leads to shame and we feel that God cannot accept this sin within us. If I do the same sin for the 500th time, surely God has run out of patience with me, right? But such an attitude does not understand our ultimate cleansing. If you are a true believer, you are already clean. Nothing can change that and the guilt and shame you feel may not be from the Lord. As Hebrews 4 says, even in our sin, we can approach the throne of grace with confidence to receive mercy and find grace in our time of need.

5. Is essential for all ministry.

This pattern that Jesus laid out was given to his disciples on the night of his betrayal. This was integral to their training. Jesus had repeatedly sent them out in his power and authority to heal and proclaim the kingdom of God. This was as much training for them as anything else Jesus had ever done. If they were to go out in power and with God's gifts at their disposal they must also go out in complete humility. There would be no more room for a debate among the disciples about who was the greatest. There could be no more jockeying for the number one position. After Jesus' resurrection and ascension the disciples would be tasked with spreading the gospel throughout the known world. That much ministry responsibility required the utmost humility. Jesus was telling them that they should go out in humility or don't go out at all.

When the call committee was interviewing for Ryan's position, we brought in three guys for the final onsite interviews. One of the guys looked quite good on paper and had a good skype interview so we brought him in for another interview. He was more than qualified but he had a cockiness about him that was evident to all of us. When he left we all just sort of looked at each other and without saying a word, we knew what everyone else was thinking. This guy was qualified in every way except that he was lacking humility. The discussion took all of about 60 seconds before we knew he was not the one.

But humility is not just essential for disciples, missionaries and pastors. It is essential for all ministry and for every believer. Both Peter and James include in their letters the well-known quote from Proverbs—"God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble." You do not want to find yourself being opposed by the Almighty God.

Removes the cloak of false spirituality

Did Jesus wash Judas' feet? No doubt he did, but this did not bring about belief in Judas. So even if Jesus himself were to wash your feet, it would not, by itself, result in your salvation. Which is why infant baptism can never save a person and should never be relied upon as such. Some churches practice infant baptism, which is very much like our child dedication we witnessed

today, but this never results in salvation. Judas was as much an unbeliever as he had ever been. And Jesus always knew this. Way back in chapter six Jesus said, “Did I not choose you, the twelve? And yet one of you is a devil.”⁷¹ He spoke of Judas the son of Simon Iscariot, for he, one of the twelve, was going to betray him (6:70-71).

I would say that in the entire history of Christianity, no one has had a bigger, thicker, more complete false cloak of spirituality than Judas. We are always shocked when a high-profile believer or someone we personally know has a moral failure. But could you imagine the shock by the other eleven disciples when Judas betrayed Jesus?

This is what makes a prideful Christian so dangerous. A false spiritual cloak can be extremely difficult to see through. No one but Jesus could see through Judas'. What does this look like? That's the thing. You look like a typical Christian. Actually, you may even look like a mature Christian. Judas did. Now I am not saying that our church is filled with a bunch of Judases but my point is that spiritual pride is so deceitful. About fifteen years ago, I remember asking someone if they thought I was prideful but I asked the question like this, “I'm not prideful, am I.” Do you see, the question assumed a negative answer. That's the wrong way to ask a friend a question. Of course I had pride in me and I still do. Pride is the mother of all sin and since I still sin, I have pride.

Would you be willing to ask this question of a trusted friend. “Could you please help me see the ways in which I am prideful? In what ways am I cloaking my pride in spiritual language and hiding my pride behind Bible verses? I don't recommend you ask that question of just any random person in the church. Make sure it is a trusted friend who knows you. If you can see that pride, repent and confess that pride, it would be a powerful slayer of sin. And even better, if you humble yourself, God promises to lift you up.

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¹ Carson, D. A. (1991). *The Gospel according to John* (p. 462). Leicester, England; Grand Rapids, MI: Inter-Varsity Press; W.B. Eerdmans.

² Here's a great quote from a believer: “Pride must die in you, or nothing of heaven can live in you.” - Andrew Murray

³ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Fellowship_of_Grace_Brethren_Churches#cite_note-5

⁴ <http://www.cgbci.org/statement-of-faith.html>

⁵ <http://www.fgbc.org/cci>