

November 13, 2005

## “A Spiritual Plague – Pride” Amos 6:1-14

FCF: Reality of the struggle with pride

**PROPOSITION:** (anchor) Because pride is a pandemic situation,  
(magnet) we must take it seriously and take appropriate measures.

### **SCRIPTURE INTRODUCTION:**

A report from the front line ([READ C. S. Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, p.41](#)):

*The Enemy wants to bring the man to a state of mind in which he could design the best cathedral in the world, and know it to be the best, and rejoice in the fact, without being any more (or less) or otherwise glad at having done it than he would be if it had been done by another. The Enemy wants him, in the end, to be so free from any bias in his own favour that he can rejoice in his own talents as frankly and gratefully as in his neighbor's talents – or in a sunrise, an elephant, or a waterfall. He wants each man, in the long run, to be able to recognize all creatures (even himself) as glorious and excellent things.*

“What front line does this report come from?” you ask. The spiritual war in the realm of the principalities and powers as described by C. S. Lewis in The Screwtape Letters. Certainly Lewis is known for “The Narnia Chronicles”. But here he writes of the counsel given by a senior demon to his junior charge as to how to trip up his assigned “patient”. In this case, the task involves confusion regarding humility and the struggle with pride.

Now, while this is obviously a fictional work, it speaks to how things are. We indeed are confused regarding humility and we do struggle greatly with pride.

**SCRIPTURE READING:** [Amos 6:1-14](#)

### **PRAYER FOR ILLUMINATION**

### **SERMON INTRODUCTION:**

Let me read you this short news bulletin ([READ World, 11/12/05, p.8](#)):

*Amid global fears that a deadly bird flu virus sweeping through flocks in Asia and pockets of eastern Europe could mutate into a human flu that could kill millions, President Bush outlined a \$7.1 billion strategy Nov. 1 to prepare for a possible worldwide flu pandemic. The plan would overhaul vaccine production so eventually every American could be inoculated within six months of a pandemic's beginning.*

Likely, you'd have to have been living in a cave not to have heard of the concern regarding this possible pandemic. Its scope could be global, the results deadly. Some are no doubt overstating the danger; others no doubt downplaying it. It's shocking to many who feel somewhat surprised that the modern world could be impacted by such a thing.

The pandemic Amos spoke of was obviously one of another kind. Its scope – again global but his greatest concern is within the church, the LORD's people. The results equally deadly but in a different way. And while one could hardly overstate the danger, no doubt there is the possibility of downplaying it to our peril. What is this pandemic being spoken of? Shockingly – for there is so little grounds for it – pride.

Let me remind you of where we are in our study. The Lion is roaring – roaring against the nations, but most especially His people. They were His own, called out as His for His purposes. With that came certain privileges – the Law, the ceremonies, the Temple system. But with that came certain responsibility and accountability as well – both of which His people had consistently spurned. And thus, under the intensity of His gaze, according to the covenant stipulations, they were now facing certain chastening.

Who is the specific target in this passage? ([READ Amos 6:1](#)) Clearly, it is the leaders of the people. But the leaders were the representatives of the people, the shapers of culture. So the whole nation is at risk. The pride being spoken to here is a spiritual pandemic for which appropriate measures simply must be taken – then and now.

## I. SERIOUS SITUATION

But perhaps the first question to consider stems from the assertion itself – as far as spiritual maladies go, is pride really so bad we would call it a pandemic? Do we really need to take it so seriously? If we believe Amos, yes (**READ Amos 6:8**).

### A) *Divine Displeasure*

Clearly, divine displeasure is being spoken to here.

#### 1. Divine oath

The Lord GOD, the LORD, the God of hosts, has sworn by Himself – literally, “by His soul”. This is an oath promised and committed at the deepest level. What would that be?

#### 2. Divine opposition

It is a divine oath of divine opposition – “*I abhor, hate, loath*” the pride, the arrogance, of my people. And as if the word were not severe enough, the tense indicates something continual, perpetual, lasting, ongoing – not simply some fleeting emotion that will pass.

### B) *Coming Judgment*

And what follows this divine displeasure is divine judgment (**READ Amos 6:8**).

#### 1. Coming destruction

Clearly, great destruction is being alluded to here and later in the chapter (**READ Amos 6:11-14**). The Assyrian army would be coming against Israel in just a few short years.

#### 2. Resulting despair

Destruction would follow in their wake – as would despair (**READ Amos 6:9-10**). The image here is of the effects of a long siege. The population would be decimated. The survivors would be so shaken that they would hesitate even to mention the name of the God who had brought this to pass for fear it might attract His attention upon themselves.

### *Application:*

Do we need to take this seriously? How can we not? What then should we do? Bow. Bow and beseech. We talked about this word “beseech” a bit last Sunday evening during our Concert of Prayer. It means to plead, to urge. We must bow before Him and beseech Him to show us such pride and cleanse us from it. Pride is a poison whose stream runs far back through time and beyond – to the fall of Satan himself, then to the fall of our first parents, and then on to every high handed act of their descendents.

We must face this and cry out, “*Lord, I know I am susceptible to this. And surely I am guilty in more ways than I can imagine. And I know you despise such arrogance in the hearts of your people. I know also your Son was punished in my place for such folly. And so I can’t turn a blind eye to it. Not because I’m longing to avoid what might happen to me but rather how it would grieve you all the more. I can’t bear it. It’s a poison in me, between us, and those around me. I beseech you. Root it out.*”

This is a pandemic. And we need to take it seriously.

## II. TELLING SYMPTOMS

Certainly, Amos shows us that much. But not only the gravity of the situation but its symptoms as well. There are signs of such infection readily seen. Look with me.

### A) *Self Confidence*

The first stage entails an overdeveloped self confidence.

#### 1. In their strength

Back to verse 8 (**READ Amos 6:8**). These strongholds were fortresses, citadels – a source and symbol of military might. They were the object of Israel’s confidence and security. And the LORD promised to wipe them out, to show them up for the shacks they

were. (READ Amos 6:13a) A play on words – “Lo-debar,” a place of victories in the past, literally means “nothing.” That is, “*You rejoice in that which is nothing.*”

## 2. In their accomplishments

So pride shows itself in security found in oneself. And in an over-inflated assessment of accomplishments as well (READ Amos 6:13b). This is also reflected in verses 1 and 2 (READ Amos 6:1-2). They had begun to believe their own press. Yes, indeed theirs was the first of the nations. Yes, theirs was a position of prominence. And they knew it all too well. So well they had begun to think, “*We did this. This is all of us. Not God. Us.*”

### *Illustration:*

Such delusion can get you into trouble. Steve Brown tells the story of a time he was flying first class on an airliner in the midst of a turbulent storm. The plane was shaking so much even the attendants looked a bit pale. But he felt calm. After all, what could go wrong? Everything was so nice. He was surrounded by such luxury and ease. And then it hit him. He had every reason to be calm. But it didn’t have anything to do with the stuff around him. It had to do with who was in charge of the storm.

### *Application:*

There is such a thing, of course, as godly confidence about oneself. It involves a clear and settled understanding of our gifts and accomplishments – and their source as well. It’s hardly a laudable thing, after all, to demean those things as though they weren’t real, as though the Lord had never provided them. But Amos is forcing us to consider something different – an idolatrous confidence in self that comes with obsession with self. And, as such, it’s the first sign of infection in this spreading pandemic.

## *B) Self Indulgence*

Now the second stage is in an over reaching self indulgence. Look with me.

### 1. At the expense of others

We see luxury and idleness at the expense of others, living as though no one else mattered (READ Amos 6:6b). Literally, Amos speaks here of the “breaking of Joseph”. An interesting phrase, conjuring up images of Joseph alone in the well, abandoned, betrayed, and soon to be sold by his brothers. Such was what was happening in Israel.

### 2. For themselves

An abandoning of others for themselves. An obsession with self (READ Amos 4:4-7). You can imagine the way a shepherd such as Amos might view such excesses with flocks. The picture of their singing and composing like David tells us they were playing like royalty. They drunk wine from bowls – possibly even sacramental bowls. A putting themselves first, ahead of others. And it will be just such in the exile. *Clearly, they had the idea that they were worthy, that they deserved it all. They and no one else.*

### *Illustration:*

Such complacency. D. A. Carson tells the story of his high school history teacher soon after returning from World War II. While riding the bus, he overheard a well-to-do woman whose husband was employed in the arms industry say, “*I hope this war doesn’t end soon. We’ve never had it so good.*” He had watched men die and had himself been shot. “*We’ve never had it so good.*” Self indulgence comes with an obsession with self.

### *Application:*

Could we be guilty of such an over-inflated over-reaching sense of entitlement? Of such unfeeling callousness? Of such uncaring obtuseness? Yes, we could. We may not have “broken Joseph”. But are we grieved by his ruin? Will we not act?

No, we won't – not if we're obsessed with ourselves. For it will cost too much. We'll have to give up our coveted “rights” to peace and prosperity, ease and safety. And that's too much to ask for many of us. But we have no rights. God's people have never been in a place to demand rights. For we are His and not our own – wondrously His and set free not to worship ourselves but to give ourselves to Him and others.

### CONCLUSION:

Well, thus far we've dealt with the severity of the problem and the symptoms of the disease. What about the cure? What will get at the root of our struggle?

A two-step process is in order. The first involves ceasing denial – what I alluded to earlier in the need to bow and beseech. We have to acknowledge the commonality we share with the people Amos was addressing, the proneness we share to the same heart's sickness. What areas will we find this? Perhaps the better question is “What areas will we not?” Welling up from the inside and spewing forth to the outside. In our thoughts and actions. And speech as well. James Stalker, a pastor and professor in 19<sup>th</sup> century Scotland, wrote in his The Seven Deadly Sins and the Seven Cardinal Virtues that we can see it in how much we insist on talking about our favorite subject – us – and how we are continually dragging conversation back in some way to make it about ourselves. Everything reminds us of us. Everything is a segue to me. My intellect, my artistic aptitude, my physical giftedness. My struggles, my heartache, my trials and tribulations – all that's wrong in my life. My fame, my fortune – all that's right in my life. The graces God has given me, the disciplines, the growth, our life with Him – we twist it in such a way that it's all of me, by me, to me, and for me. Something's wrong here.

That's the first step – coming to see this and ceasing denial. The second involves simply this – seeking the cure. Let me read you this quote from Stalker's book ([READ Stalker, pp.21-22](#)) “*What then, are the remedies for pride?*” Not a bad question.

*Anything that makes us think more of God or our neighbor is a remedy because, as I have said, the essence of pride is selfishness. We are proud because we are thinking of ourselves alone and have forgotten the claims of God and the claims of our fellow creatures. We have forgotten that God has given us all our gifts, whether of nature, fortune, or grace. These belong to Him; we are only stewards of them, and there is a day coming when we shall have to give an account of how they have been employed. And, if we receive our gifts that we may be the stewards of God, we also receive them to minister to others. It is only a false greatness which lords it over others; the golden greatness consists in service.*

Now let me build on what Stalker says here. Service is said to be a remedy for pride. Seeking God and following His commands – not watering them down to make them more achievable and comfortable but really hearing and heeding them – is said to be an antidote for this disease within. How? Think with me. When we seek to obey the commandments; to do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with our God; to love God with all we are and our neighbor as ourselves, we learn some things pretty quickly. We can't do it. Something's broken inside and we can't do it. Not in our strength. We need Him. We need the One who has given us these commands to sustain us as He alone can do. And in that is the cure for pride – thinking less of ourselves and more of Him. More of Him who sustains us. More of Him who knows us. More of Him who will forgive us – picking us up and embracing us after each of our many falls. Yes, He hates this sinful pride. But He loves us sinners. Seeing that and seeing Him helps us to see clearly. And to crush our pride. May the Lord bless His people with such sight.

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