

The Body Fitly Joined Together (2)

Pride and Envy in the Church

Last time we saw that the church is united in the truth of its head, Jesus Christ. We considered how important it is for all the members of the church, and especially the young people as the rising generation, to love doctrine and the life that proceeds from it, for that knowledge is the very life and unity of the church. Disunity in doctrine is a serious disease that threatens the life of the body.

This time, I would like us to consider another threat to the body of Christ. These are sins that plague everyone. Perhaps they do not manifest themselves as much in childhood, but they intensify in the teenage years. However well they may be masked in the later years of adulthood, they always lurk in the heart, constantly making themselves known in our thoughts and occasionally in our speech and actions. They are pride and envy.

Addressing sins in our lives such as pride and envy is important today. Pride and envy are sins of the heart. We may and must address very outward sins that may be present among the church, such as drunkenness, watching sinful movies, and abusing God's gift of music. That is right and good to do. However, we must not neglect to address sins of the heart and the evil fruits of these sins. In a series on church unity, I feel it is important to address pride and envy because, while we may not always think this way, these kinds of "subtle" sins of the heart—which often come out in our behavior, too—can do as much, if not more, damage to the body of Christ than can outwardly sinful behaviors. There is not one who can look at his heart and say, "this doesn't apply to me!" The Word of God convicts us all.

First, then, envy must be examined. In an attitude of envy, we forget the good gifts that God created us with, and desire the gifts in others He was not pleased to give us. When we are envious, we deny our own place in the body, wanting to perform someone else's function. This brings discontent and anxiety to our lives. Although we would never think it, we are really saying in our hearts that we are dissatisfied with the way that God made us. Envy, and the discontent that it brings, can even lead to anger with our own lot in life, and jealousy with the fact that someone else has something, or can do something, that we will never be able to have or do. In a meditation on I Corinthians 13, the great chapter on love, the late Rev. Gerrit Vos described envy this way:

"Envy is the hatred of the natural man over against his neighbor, either in prosperity or adversity. When the brother prospereth, envy is not to be consoled. It gnaws its

heart out in the beholding of success of the neighbor: it should not happen to him. An envious soul cannot see the prosperity of his fellows. All the good things that he hath ought to be mine! All the success he hath should be mine! I cannot see that my brother fares well...our dress, our goods, our person, our children, our all – it is good, praiseworthy, glorious! But the other? It should not be; it should not happen. I, capital I, must be glorious in my little heaven. It is the age-old sin: we are our own little god, and there must not, there dare not, be any god than we!”[\[1\]](#)

It can be said that living in this world is comparable to walking on a balance beam, being careful not to fall into envy, as just stated, but also careful not to lean toward pride. Oh, how pride can be so real in our lives! For young people, pride can come with so-called popularity. Especially in high school, popularity can make a student’s head so big that only a select few can have the privilege of hanging out with him or her, or the “cool group” of which he or she is a part. Inevitably, some are excluded in this kind of environment. Pride can drive a wedge in relationships and tear apart the precious body of Christ. So serious is this sin of pride as it rears its ugly head in high school and in this stage of a young person’s life, that students who are excluded in this kind of atmosphere can and do often leave school and even the church. Young people, do not ever underestimate the power of pride!

The pride that popularity can bring is only one small example. If we young people do not attack the root of our pride when we are young, it will only grow and further affect our lives as a member of Christ’s body. It feeds itself, and if it is not fought against, will fill our spiritual heart with terrible disease. Pride makes a man or woman hardened, unwilling to ever admit wrong in many areas of life—from the floor of synod, to the home in marriage, to the workplace between employees and employers. Pride praises self and looks down on the neighbor. Pride boastfully prays, “God, I thank thee, that I am not as other men are...”[\[2\]](#) Pride is the opposite of Paul’s instruction, “in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.”[\[3\]](#) Pride focuses on self’s achievements, self’s accomplishments, and self’s recognition. Such a puffed up person severely weakens church unity.

But what does Scripture say concerning this? That we find these kinds of attitudes in our own hearts should not surprise us because they are as old as sin itself. Pride, for example, arose on the scene of history in the very beginning. Satan said to Eve in Genesis 3:4, 5, “Ye shall not surely die: for God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.” Not satisfied with what they had, they wanted more. In the pride of their heart, they desired to be as God. Wanting to be like God weighed heavier in the balance than contentment in the way God originally created them. For us, too, an element of pride and envy can be found in nearly every, if not all, our sins.

The world would say that envious people have a self-esteem problem, and would diagnose a proud person with a case of overconfidence. That is not the Scriptural answer to these sins that divide the church. When we see our many sins against each other, and the disunity they can bring in the realm of the church, we are reminded that God calls us to the picture of a body, and how its parts work in harmony: “From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.”^[4] That the church is like a body with many different parts working together in unity is something that we already know, but do we live in this knowledge? When I am envious of another person’s ability or personality, am I living in the knowledge that God gave him or her certain gifts to perform in His kingdom in a different way? When I look down my nose at someone in detestable pride, am I remembering that God uses all the members of the body, regardless of my judgment on them, for the strengthening and good of the whole?

Scripture is not done speaking in regard to this. We are reminded in James 2 that God is not a respecter of persons. When we view others through the eyes of envy and pride, we are looking at them from the faulty, biased, and sinful judgments of our mind which cannot be trusted. We are to see our family in the church without respect of persons. That is why we must understand that we are nothing but wicked sinners apart from the grace of God in Christ. We must see and understand that as young people. No matter who I am, no matter what I do, no matter who I know, no matter what I can achieve, no matter how popular I think I am, or no matter how bitter I may feel about my life in comparison to others, I am a member of the body of Christ by grace! No one is worthy of that citizenship in the body! No one may boast! No one may feel lower or less worthy than another! Young people, what a deep, profound truth to always remember in all our relationships. In this way, as was seen in the last article, our identity as a sinner saved by grace directly relates and must be applied to our life in the church.

As those who are called to love our neighbors as ourselves, we do not want to live a life of pride and envy. Instead, let us seek to love one another and build one another up, knowing that we are all of one body. In the next article, we will consider a specific group of people whom we think to be “weaker” in the church—those with special needs—and how they are a part of the body.