

***Bursting the Bubble of Pride***  
*“Knowledge puffs up; but love builds up.”*  
*1 Corinthians 8:1*

After hatching into a new creation in Christ, I grew into a spiritual egghead. For years I abandoned “Dallas,” my favorite nighttime Soap, to spend Friday evenings at a table with Greek and Hebrew texts, grammar books, and diagrammed sentences. Two such nights each week were dedicated to being part of a group that gathered year after year, and virtually never took breaks or vacations. Everyone laughed and munched on snacks while we brainstormed the original languages of Scripture, but this wasn’t a place for the faint-hearted. Much homework preceded the assignments, and no one was exempt from the siege of grammatical cases, tenses, voices and moods. But with such tools we translated large portions of the Old and New Testaments. Time stood still, and class could continue until well after midnight.

On top of this I also devoted 10-15 hours a week listening to expository Bible teaching. I was a young believer and pursued every possible avenue to grow in grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ through a deeper understanding of Scripture. But I didn’t see that pride crept in. I felt privy to an elite world and believed my knowledge would equip me to do great spiritual things. I really didn’t bother to consider 1 Corinthians 1; how God hides spiritual truth from the wise and reveals it to the simple-minded. This seemed more applicable to Pharisaic old men rather than to me.

Fruit bearing was important, and I wanted to impact other lives. But again, pride crept in. Rather than speak the truth in love, I’d be too quick to use technicalities in a discussion in order to gain the edge. I didn’t get it: winning verbal debates wasn’t the way to win souls. Furthermore, such interactions included those in spiritual leadership. I’d listen to messages of Bible teachers and pastors with a critical ear towards the technical nuances. Is it a Textus Receptus translation? Aorist or present tense? Active or passive voice? If time was allotted for questions or an open discussion, I might pepper my comments with technical jargon instead of closing my mouth and opening my heart to the function of another’s spiritual gift.

However, the grace of God revealed the painful truth to me. During this time I met the man who later became my husband. He had also studied the Bible in depth for years, but his knowledge of Greek pretty much stopped at the letters of his college fraternity. Yet I recognized someone who was not only knowledgeable, but humble too. I wasn’t sure what made him tick, but it was obvious what didn’t—pride and arrogance. He’d refer to Proverbs 18:12, “Before destruction the heart of man is haughty, and before honor is humility.” Until now I had placed little weight on humility as a character quality. But now I saw haughtiness in a different light as something abhorrent to God.

Recognizing this in me was akin to beholding my image in the mirror first thing in the morning. Yuck! When pride puffs up, love can’t edify and the resulting picture isn’t pretty, nor does it please God. Because knowing His Word shouldn’t be a bunch of academic information in a vacuum; or worse, haughty air expelled from an inflated head. Rather, it’s loving God and imitating His love in our treatment of others. After all, Christ was divine and all knowing, yet He never treated people in a high-minded way. Instead, our God became human and a Servant. So how much less justified was I, a flawed human, to misuse knowledge of His Word to exalt myself?

Convicted, I felt compelled to turn away from pride and pursue humility as I beheld the works of humble Christians that put me to shame. I saw amazing hospitality of those who helped others in need. I saw those who labored to show mercy, or were generous, and their joy spoke volumes about how they considered it the highest privilege to serve Christ. Their acts of kindness proved that a heart for God touches other lives; it doesn’t exalt itself or hide among the pages of theological books.

For God equips each member to serve all parts of His collective body, the Church. Unquestionably, accurate doctrine is vital to spiritual health; but a head full of knowledge is no substitute for a heart full of compassion. That’s why we all need to share the same attitude of humility in our diverse actions as servants. Whether teachers, encouragers, givers, helpers or something else we’re each gifted by the same God for service to bring glory to Christ as His body. And what happens to us as a result? There’s an infusion of joy and purpose to living. In other words, in losing our lives we find them.

But was all that learning a waste of time for me? Absolutely not, and I’m thankful today for the privilege of having tools that offer deeper insight into the Bible. But above all, it’s our good works that should shine forth as a light to this dark world. And what about the pride of knowledge? Or any type of pride for that matter? Well, those are rotten eggs that should never be hatched, not by a spiritual egghead or anyone else.

*By Mary Nixon*