

THE PRINCE OF THIS WORLD & THE PRIDE OF LIFE

By David L. Burris

The Right Reverend Dr. Morgan Dix of Manhattan's most prominent Episcopal Church certainly fashioned himself a serious cultured man & obviously did not see himself as worthy of the cascade of indignities that began early one morning in February 1880. It started with the sales call from Acme Safe Company. Who had given them an inaccurate sales lead that he needed safekeeping for all his earthly treasures? Thus, Acme Safe Company initiated what could easily have had the making of a Road Runner cartoon. The Right Reverend was to be a victim of a highly choreographed campaign of sales calls at 15 minute interval for product lines each increasingly embarrassing & personal services like wet nurses, waltz instructors, wigmakers, tattoo artists, divorce lawyers & home doctor visits for even more intimate hygiene or health conditions. Over the following weeks & by the hundreds, he was thanked for his unsolicited endorsements of the medicinal properties of whiskeys, corrected for his unseemly ambitions for elevated church office, and criticized for controversial opinion pieces in local papers & religious publications.

The Right Reverend Dix could not imagine who could hate him so. The police were clueless and could not determine any motivation. In time – by way of a watermark - the postal inspectors solved the case. Interrogation revealed that the offender had not hated Dix but he hated Dix's pride of self,

family & religious heritage. It proved a case of “the proud hate the proud.” The prankster – a former Confederate Colonel mostly hated Dix’s pride in his Union General Civil War service. This episode is an excellent example of how the proud most accurately recognize feigned humility – the “phony baloney” not usually exposed until under the tunnel vision of extreme stress.

C.S. Lewis in *Christian Reflections* wrote: “A man is never as proud as when striking an attitude of humility.” Reputation for strength of character or humble pride has been the source of false confidence leading to the downfall of many a “good” person. C.S. Lewis in *Mere Christianity* wrote: “It was through pride that the devil became the devil... Pride or self-conceit leads to every other vice... It is the complete Anti-God State of Mind.” 1st John 2: 16 tells us that worldly pride of life has always served as a distraction to authentic spiritual growth & formation. Our story really starts in the Garden of Eden when the first couple were introduced to the original trickster Satan. It was in the Garden that mankind first shared in the Proudful Sin of Satan by way of human self-exaltation. In the Post-Eden Fallen World the problem of pride became socially pandemic. Aristotle & Augustine described the classical civilizations as driven by pride. Aristotle stated that “Greeks identify happiness with honor” and Augustine stated of the early Romans that “for the love of praise – the love of money was overcome.” This was the Bible World of the First Century into which the Son of God was Born.

We may ask - How is this problem of human nature to be countered? Jesus Christ taught us in two ways – by indirect example & by direct command. In Luke 4 - Jesus provides us his own self in positive example as he prepared for his earthly ministry & was tempted by the devil while in the wilderness. Satan tempted Christ by questioning the Godhead in mutual esteem & Jesus responded by giving honor to the Father by quoting Him in scripture. Satan also tempted Jesus in an end justifies the means modification of God's Plan. Jesus responded that to alter God's markers & methodology was to tempt the Father. In Luke 14 – Jesus provides us timeless precept & principle that applies in Old World Acquired Honor Society & New World Achieved Honor Society – in rule of thumb. The Master Teacher instructs that we should in every occasion not self-exalt but self-level leaving others the responsibility to determine our formal ranking & deserved social status.

C.S. Lewis tells us in Mere Christianity that “without this (worldly) comparison-competition - pride is gone.” In the Freedom of Self Forgetfulness Lewis States: “The thing we remember from meeting a truly gospel-humble person is how much they seemed to be totally in us. Because the essence of gospel-humility is not thinking more of myself or thinking less of myself, it is thinking of myself less.”

To “Think of Ourselves Less” is the clue to combat “Satan's Favorite Go-To Temptation of Human Pride.” The Master Teacher's use of paradox as a device to convey a spiritual

message combined with the task of translating the more nuanced Greek into modern English has caused some minor confusion. These translations – taken out of context – and extended to their logical conclusion have suggested God commands an impossible standard. In his dairy of “The Year of Living Biblically” A.J. Jacob’s claims Exodus 20: 17 means to avoid coveting you must not view advertising & from Proverbs 11: 2 he interprets that the humble should not engage in competitive sports. Even some Bible students have had difficulty with Jesus’ counter-intuitive pronouncement that it is the meek which shall inherit. When meekness is falsely equated with weakness some out of fear have tended toward a bi-polar spirituality & many have made of themselves “merchandise” as claimed by con artists like Lucian of Samosata.

In meekly “Thinking of Ourselves Less” there is nothing to fear. In fact, meekness is in opposition of fear – “it is moral courage.”

In other words, when the gospel-humble with moral courage overcome the tempter trickster – ultimately they inherit & God Will Exalt!