

### **A Study of Vainglory**

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*“And when you pray, you must not be like the hypocrites. For they love to stand and pray in the synagogues and at the street corners, that they may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward.” – Matthew 6:5*

#### **A Quote from the movie *The Natural*:**

“Someday I’ll break every record in the book. I know I got it in me.”

“What will you hope to accomplish?”

“When I walk down the street, people will say, ‘There goes Roy Hobbs, the best there ever was.’”

“Is that all?”

“Well, what else is there?”

#### **What is *VAINGLORY* and why isn’t it usually seen in the list of seven today?**

Originally the list of seven vices was a list of eight. Vainglory and pride were two separate vices. After Pope Gregory, the list was trimmed down to seven (because seven is a good Biblical number!). Pride was made the root and vainglory was one of the seven. However, in modern lists pride and vainglory are almost always counted as the same vice. For our purposes this Lent, we will consider vainglory on Palm Sunday and pride on Good Friday.

As a definition, “Vainglory is the excessive and disordered desire for recognition and approval from others.”<sup>1</sup> Vainglory is the constant maintenance of our image before others. Sometimes it goes by the name *vanity* as well. Like the other vices, it takes something good, the approval of others, and uses it for excessively selfish and prideful ends. It’s the desire to please others gone completely awry.

#### **Pride vs. Vainglory**

Even though pride and vainglory are so similar that they can be used interchangeably very often, there is a difference between the two:

**Pride** – wants to genuinely be #1 (especially a vertical sin, before God)

**Vainglory** – wants the acclaim and fame of #1 whether it’s deserved or not (especially a horizontal sin, before others)

“In short, what makes vainglory distinct from pride is love of ‘the show’.”<sup>2</sup>

#### **Examples of Vainglory - Celebrities**

How many celebrities can you name right off the top of your head? It would take you no time at all to list off fifty folks in TV, movies, or professional sports. But what about a list of your *heroes*? How many heroes can you name right now? How long would that list be? DeYoung shows that there is a great “chasm” between these two lists—people with far more glory than really deserved and people deserving great glory and receiving hardly any.<sup>3</sup>

### **Other Examples of Vainglory**

“It is difficult to find someone who has never exaggerated something she has done or made up something about herself to impress those listening. Or perhaps we might say something bad or false about another person to get our friends to think we are funny or entertaining. Or we do something good with (or perhaps only because of) the expectation that others will notice it. Or again, we do something good that others did *not* notice, and feel disappointed by that. We may even do something wrong, illegal, or foolish because we want attention from a certain group of people. Many of us lie to seem better than we are, out of an excessive desire for approval. Others of us worry about a performance or task because we are overly concerned about gaining the approval of those judging it. We invest ourselves in building a reputation that is based on shallow, trivial things. Or we do something good, get attention for it, and then take all the credit for our goodness for ourselves, without the slightest nod to the giver of all good and perfect gifts. We may not know these things under the name “vainglory,” but the definition fits them to a T.”<sup>4</sup>

Think of some of the absolutely *foolish* and *shallow* places you and I will look for glory: the cleanest car, the newest fashions, the most flattering dress, the best bench press, the biggest truck, the most successful diet, the greenest yard, the most athletic children (not the one with the best character), the highest degree from the best school, what we did back in high school, the number of people we know, the books we have read, etc. In all of this, do we stop to ask, “How much do these things really matter? To what lengths should we go to impress? Whose approval should we desire most, and why?”<sup>5</sup>

There’s another especially modern demon of vainglory—our phones. Now we can Facebook Live, Instagram, Snapchat, video message, or YouTube it so that others will most certainly see it. Here’s the modern question: “Did it really happen at all if it wasn’t caught on video and put on Facebook or YouTube?”

From Dave Ramsey – “We buy things we don't need with money we don't have to impress people we don't like.”

### **What about Christians and vainglory (the worst case)?**

Sadly, Christians are especially susceptible to the worst kind of vainglory, which is seeking no glory from God and no glory for God. This means we can do all the best works for all the worst reasons. As Jesus teaches in the Sermon on the Mount, if you give, fast, and pray only so that other people will see you, then that vainglory is the only reward you get. In the meantime, you completely lose the real glory—the glory *from* God and glory *for* God. How sad that Christians can do great work of virtue while making the whole enterprise worthless because they have done it all for their own sinful vainglory?!

### **What is our true GLORY?**

Notice the word – VAIN + GLORY. Which part is the problem? Glory isn’t bad at all. In fact, it’s a gift of God. When we seek after glory that is *vain*, then we miss out on the glory of God. We often seek after vainglory because we’re scared. We don’t want to face up to what we really are, so we try to hide it behind shallow vanities. For example, young pastors are often very scared of their congregations discovering that they don’t know very much. So they work very hard at the appearance of great wisdom

with detailed sermons and bible studies and by speaking with an air of intelligence. (Lord, have mercy on me.) *What are you hiding from others?*

Yet this is the glory of God—He knows everything about you and still approves of you in Jesus Christ. There is nothing hidden before God. Before Him, you are FULLY KNOWN. And He approves of you because you are baptized into Jesus Christ and you are one of His children. We are free to live in a “no spin zone”. We don’t have to twist everything about ourselves to make it appear glorious. God knows us, forgives us, and loves us in Christ.

Consider the words of David in Psalm 3:3, “But you, O LORD, are a shield about me, *my glory*, and the lifter of my head.” This will be the focus of our sermon this Palm Sunday as we hear of Jesus and His very *un-vainglorious* ways, riding into town on a donkey to bear the humiliation of the cross.

Another study on PRIDE will come next week in preparation for Good Friday.

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<sup>1</sup> DeYoung, *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies*. Brazos, 2009, p. 60.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., p. 62.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., p. 60.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., p. 61.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. p. 64.