**Vainglorious**

*by Stan Cox*

The American Standard Version uses an interesting and appropriate word to translate the Greek term *kenodoxos* in Galatians 5:26. It is a term that is rarely used in our day, **vainglorious**.

*“Let us not become* ***vainglorious****, provoking one another, envying one another.”*

The King James translation is similar though it translates the word with a phrase *“desirous of vain glory.”* More modern translations such as the ESV, NKJV and NIV use the term *“conceited.”* While the word conceited is certainly an accurate translation, it is not nearly as evocative as the more antiquated vainglorious.

The Greek term is derived from two root words: *kenos*, meaning empty or vain; and *doxa* meaning glory, dignity, honor. **Thayer** defines the term in this way: “glorying without reason, conceited, vain glorious, eager for empty glory.”

**Webster** defines vainglorious: “having or showing too much pride in your abilities or achievements.” So, the English term fits well as a translation from the Greek.

Paul wrote these words within the context of a discussion of the fruit of the Spirit: *“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self- control. Against such there is no law”* (Gal. 5:22-23). To look at these characteristics is to see the contrast between them and conceit, envy and strife. Where the man of God is desirous of peace, and willing to sacrifice self for its attainment, the vainglorious man is centered on his own wants, desires and advancement. To be a mature Christian is to be *selfless*, while the vainglorious are, by definition, *selfish*.

The vainglorious or conceited individual has pride without reason. He has an inflated view of his own value. He is constantly seeking validation from others, and is willing to denigrate his neighbor in order to bask in the glorious contrast between him and his perceived subordinate. He is like the prideful Pharisee of Jesus’ parable in Luke 18, who prays, *“God, I thank You that I am not like other men”* (Luke 18:11).

That parable ends with this conclusion from the Lord, *“Everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted”* (Luke 18:14). The Holy Spirit concurs, expressing His view through the pen of James. In the third chapter of that epistle, he writes of the boastful tongue (James 3:5), and of a demonic wisdom that is *“self-seeking”* (16). He contrasts that with the heavenly wisdom that is *“willing to yield”* (17), and that makes peace (18). In chapter four he quotes Proverbs 34, *“God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble”* (Proverbs 34:6), and calls upon his readers to *“Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and He will life you up”* (10). He ends the chapter with a condemnation of the arrogant man who believes himself to be the master and sustainer of his own life, *“All such boasting is evil”* (16).

In his book *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis contends that pride is among the most destructive of sins: (Quote edited for length).

“Pride has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began… it is enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God… As long as you are proud you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people; and, of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that is above you. Pride is spiritual cancer; it eats up the very possibility of love, contentment, or even common sense.”

So, Paul instructs in our text, *“Let us not become vainglorious”* (ASV). Knowing the danger of that sin, we might ask how to avoid it. The answer is to understand our relative position as we compare ourselves to God. When Job became presumptuous, God responded to him, *“Who is this who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Now prepare yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer Me”* (Job 38:2-3). God then describes Himself as the omnipotent creator of the universe, asking Job, *“Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding”* (38:4). After the examination given to him by God, a chastened Job declared, *“Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know… Therefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes.”* (42:3,6).

Any consideration of the greatness of Jehovah leaves us with a realization of our own relative insignificance. It is precisely this that leads a man to a proper understanding of his place in God’s creation, and the humility that is characteristic of the true child of God. *“He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?”* (Micah 6:8). The ramifications of that realization are felt fully in the realm of man’s redemption. When a man acknowledges the reality of his sin (cf. Romans 3:23), and the just penalty due (cf. Romans 6:23), he will acknowledge to Whom honor is due, *“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord”* (1 Corinthians 1:31).

**“In Understanding Be Mature”**

*by Stan Cox*

It is interesting how foundational the concept of authority is to the Bible. Almost every page includes the concept, with calls to obey God, warnings about disobedience, and examples of those who experience God’s pleasure or wrath. Often the references are explicit, but there are innumerable implications as well.

In 1 Corinthians 14, the apostle Paul instructs his readers in the matter of spiritual gifts. He there explains that the gift of prophecy is of greater value than speaking in tongues. This is because prophecy can be understood, where tongue speaking can’t (without an interpreter). Paul writes, “Yet in the church I would rather speak five words with my understanding, that I may teach others also, than ten thousand words in a tongue” (vs. 19).

He then writes, “Brethren, do not be children in understanding; however, in malice be babes, but in understanding be mature” (vs. 20). One might ask, why is it so important to be mature in understanding? The answer is found in Paul’s contention in verse 37, “If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.”

One wag said, “It is the 10 **commandments**, not the 10 **suggestions**.” We need awareness of what scripture teaches, because scripture contains God’s commandments to men. These instructions, by nature, are not optional. Remember, Jesus “became the author of eternal salvation to all who ***obey*** Him” (Hebrews 5:9).