Pride is highlighted in a parable of Jesus, in which an arrogant religious leader takes “... up HIS position [in the Jerusalem Temple] and spoke this prayer to himself ([1]) ‘... O God ... I thank you that I am not like the rest of humanity ...’” How Jesus phrases the parable is interesting, framing the man as worshiping the self. “Aren’t I wonderful? Humanity is SO lucky and undeserving to have someone as great as me.” Insert eyeroll here.

Yet, no doubt we’ve met people sort of like that and felt similar repulsion as the parable elicits. One might try to imagine, then, how God views someone coming to Him with such an attitude of presumptuous self-righteousness.

In the parable, Jesus goes on to tell of a tax collector, also in the Temple, is someone viewed as a sinner for working for the Roman occupiers. Jesus assures that the tax collector is forgiven because of his humility and sorrow before God, but the arrogant religious leader is not. And so, His lesson is that, while God does not approve of any sin, His mercy and forgiveness is reserved for the penitent—those who are humble, and sorrow for their faults and offenses against God and neighbor.

One danger that leads to arrogant pride is highlighted in Jesus’ parable: comparing ourselves with others rather than to an objective model of goodness. We can easily and will determinedly always find someone “worse” than ourselves, whether true or not. But neither God nor Man judges so much on our comparison with others as rather with the standard He calls us to imitate. Certainly, each person has his own spiritual capacities—intelligence, understanding, environment, and the like. But, O Christian, to we who have been given the gift of the Gospel, will we not remember Jesus’ words: “To those whom much has been given, much is required.” (Luke 12:48).

Arrogant pride looks down upon others, considering the self better than others. That’s what we see in the religious leader in the parable—a pride that despises and demeanes his neighbor. But: “Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.” (Proverbs 8:13)

Will we be judged favorably simply because we are richer or prettier or smarter or stronger than someone else? Riches, power, or beauty avails nothing to the arrogant and hateful. Whatever strength and beauty and intelligence we have only benefit us in the long run if we use them as they are meant to be used—to glorify God and seek goodness, and in edifying helping those in need of help, whether that be via material or spiritual assistance.

As we read of the end times: “I bring with me the recompense I will give to each according to his deeds.” (Revelation 22:12), a theme constantly repeated throughout scripture, not the least of which by Jesus Himself: “For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of his Father, and then he will repay each according to what he has done.” (Revelation 22:12)

In reading scripture, one finds that there seems to be little that God loves more than humility—the person humble before God AND Man. This is true spiritual beauty.

Have we any doubts about God’s attitude toward the arrogant? We might remember: “The man of haughty looks and arrogant heart I will not endure. (Psalm 101:5)

Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate. (Proverbs 8:13)

Everyone who is arrogant is an abomination to the LORD; be assured, he will not go unpunished. (Proverbs 16:5)

Arrogance is hateful before the Lord and before men. (Sirach 10:7)

But humility is loved by both God and man.

—If my people...humble themselves, and pray ... then I will hear from heaven... (2 Chronicles 7:14)

—God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (James 4:6)

—... this is the man to whom I will look, he that is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word. (Isaiah 66:2)

—He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the LORD require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8)

And, of course, Jesus: “... whoever humbles himself like this child, he is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. (Matthew 18:4)

And “...blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.” (Matthew 5:5)

With such promises from Jesus Himself, why do we strain to live in greater humility? Why the need to “strut our stuff”? Do we believe Him or not?

And so ... let us remember again St. Paul: “...beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love, eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.” (Ephesians 4:1-6)

For ...

The one who serves God willingly is heard; his petition reaches the heavens. The prayer of the lowly pierces the clouds; it does not rest till it reaches its goal, nor will it withdraw till the Most High responds... (Sirach 35:20-22)