

Responding to the New Atheists' attacks on the God of the Old Testament-4: "God is Proud/Arrogant" (part 1)

Rather than going into detail on the background of the New Atheists, I have decided to move forward to their various charges. Then after we examine the evidence, we will take a look at the New Atheists with the added benefit of having examined their accusations.

Daniel Dennett tells us that the Old Testament Jehovah is simply a super-*man* who is both "jealous and wrathful." For Dennett, "part of what makes Jehovah such a fascinating participant in stories of the Old Testament is his kinglike jealousy and pride, and His great appetite for praise and sacrifices."

According to Richard Dawkins, God is obsessed with "his own superiority over rival gods." He adds that this God seems to seek attention and crave praise to "make a name for Himself" (2 Sam. 7:23). When he delivers his people from Egypt He does so only "for the sake of His name" (Ps. 106:8).

So does God have an unhealthy self-preoccupation? Do the New Atheists have a point here? Is God guilty of pride? Should we just shrug our shoulders at these questions, and say something like 'oh well, I guess it is OK for Him to be proud and arrogant because He is God?'

Before one can really answer these questions, it is important to understand what pride/arrogant really means (thus the importance of understanding linguistics: how language works, so one can go beyond the bare word and get to the concept that the word is carrying or pointing to). The concepts behind the various Greek and Hebrew words for pride all convey the idea of an inflated view of self. Pride is actually a lie about one's own identity or achievements. To be proud is to live in a world propped up with falsehoods about ourselves, taking credit where credit isn't due.

It may surprise you to know that pride or being boastful is not *necessarily* sinful. Yes, we can actually "take pride" or be gratified in our work as long as the true source is recognized. Consider the Apostle Paul's boastful attitude:

2 Corinthians 10:17 But he who boasts, let him boast in the Lord.

2 Corinthians 7:14 For if in anything **I have boasted** to him about you, I was not put to shame; but as we spoke all things to you in truth, so also our boasting before Titus proved to be the truth.

2 Corinthians 9:3 But I have sent the brethren, **that our boasting about you** may not be made empty in this case, that, as I was saying, you may be prepared; 4 lest if any Macedonians come with me and find you unprepared, we (not to speak of you) should be put to shame by this confidence.

Galatians 6:14 But may it never be that **I should boast**, except in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, through which the world has been crucified to me, and I to the world.

Clearly, in the above passages Paul's pride or boastfulness was no "pull yourself up by your bootstraps" type of self-reliance. He was actually proud of early Christians' progress in their faith and in their proper use of God-given abilities. This "pride" was set in the context of full recognition of God's grace and divine enablement. The God-dependent believer can take pride or "boast in the Lord" (2 Cor. 10:17) and in the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14). This "pride" is also known as "spiritual self-esteem" (Thieme).

Pride is the antithesis of humility. So what is humility? Humility is not (proud) self-effacement! A person with humility has a realistic assessment of himself—both weaknesses and strengths. For Tim Tebow to claim that he cannot play football would be an example of *pseudo* humility. There is nothing prideful about him realizing his athleticism and skills for the game. True humility does not deny abilities but rather acknowledges God as the source of these gifts, for which one cannot take credit. What does anyone have that he did not receive from God (1 Cor. 4:7)? To be humble is to know our proper place before God—with *all of our strengths and weaknesses*.

Well, then, is God proud? No, He has a realistic view of Himself, not a false or exaggerated one. God, by definition, is Supreme Being, which makes Him intrinsically worthy of worship. In fact, our word *worship* is a kind of contraction of the Old English word *weorthscipe*—our "worth-ship." So if an all-powerful but despicably evil being demanded our worship, we should not give it to Him. He wouldn't be worthy of worship. On the other hand, if He is Supreme Being of supreme worth, then worship of Him is the only natural and desirable thing to do.

Rather than being self-serving and arrogant, the God of the Bible is actually a Self-Giving God and, yes, an incredibly Humble God. The most illustrative examples include the incarnation, kenosis, and the Cross. This will be the subject of the next essay.

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Pastor Don