

Presumptuousness

The Sin of Pride

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I want to begin the sermon today by reading parts of two unrelated stories that have come across my desk lately. These may be, in a way, more informative; but they are illustrative of the sermon.

The first one, here, is from "The Religion and Society Report" (from the February 2000 issue, pages 1-2); and I'll be reading just excerpts from this report—which is titled "False Gods."

On December 20th, the Supreme Court of Vermont decided to throw out scripture, natural law, human history, categorical imperative, and the declared will of the majority of the other states as well as the U.S. Congress. It declared that homosexual couples have the same rights to benefits and equal treatment before the law as married heterosexual couples. [And, as they say, that we must add the word 'heterosexual' to marriage shows how far 'new speak' and 'thought control' have triumphed in the American media and mentality.]

The exalted court has not yet decreed that such a union be called marriage; but, no doubt, that will come soon.

The decision of the Vermont Court will profoundly effect law and society in the United States. Some will say that it spells the death knell for marriage. At least, for the kind that is established by God and, ultimately, for the family. This is true. But our interest here is to illuminate two factors that made this decision possible.

First, a hitherto unimaginable hubris [That's an overweening pride.] and arrogance on the part of courts which substitute their will for

God, for nature, for the wisdom of the ages, for anything and everything that might set a limit to the absolutism of their judicial power.

Second, the fact that the Constitution—a human document written by men two hundred years ago, according to the best wisdom and judgment of their day—is thought to have absolute, quasi-divine authority, for any and all issues. And it is authoritatively interpreted, as with a supernatural authority, by a tiny number of non-elected human judges.

When a court makes a decision of this kind, it is arrogating to itself authority and power virtually unheard of in human history. It reminds us of the unfortunate King Herod of scripture, who did not say it of himself (but accepted it) when his audience cried out, "It is the voice of a god and not of a man." Herod was stricken by God and died. [You'll find that in Acts 12:20-23.]

Where our judges are concerned, we too [meaning, the American people] are crying, "It is the voice of God and not of men."

The second one is something that Edna Sprouse gave me last week, out of the local "Herald" newspaper. This is from page A4; and it is called "Roving Evangelist Gains Followers, Skeptics." It's from the Associated Press; and the byline is from Hazelton, Pennsylvania.

He appeared, out of the blue, back in October. Clad only in a dirty white robe, as he walked barefoot along the two lane highway into the struggling former coal town. Folks pointed at first, as the man with shoulder length hair and scruffy beard preached to whoever would listen.

Before long, though, many in this largely Roman Catholic community were embracing him as a holy man. "I would walk through fire for him," said Connie Mears, a Roman Catholic who took him in to live with her family when it became too cold to sleep outside. "He's blessed by the Holy Spirit," she said. "People's hearts are really changed after they've heard him."

The robe and messianic appearance, he says, bring attention to his ministry and make him more approachable. He says his nine-year trek [He's been doing this for nine years.] has brought him to forty-seven states and thirteen countries.

Now, as I said before, these stories have very little in common—except for, maybe, their religious undertone. But there is one attitude present in both that I am going to be speaking about today; and that is the attitude of presumptuousness. That is the title of my sermon today.

Presumptuousness is not something that we talk about a lot in the church, but we should think about it—and think about it seriously as we prepare for the Passover. We are coming into that time of the year when we need to begin evaluating ourselves, and our progress, over the past year, to see where we have fallen short. And one of the areas that we really need to look into (an area that has not been looked into an awful lot in the past) is this area of presumptuousness.

I chose these two stories because, in a way, they have parallels to what is going on in the greater Church of God. Certain churches have made decisions (certain people have made decisions) that, when one looks at them objectively, can seem awfully presumptuous. The decision by the Vermont judges parallels the decisions made by church groups to change certain doctrines on the basis of various justifications that they might come up with.

They presumptuously put themselves, and their own thinking, ahead of others (before them) who have had to make certain decisions along the same lines. Or, they have taken their own reasoning as superior to what the plain Word of God says. And they have come up with much justification based on human reasoning, based on evolutionary thought, based on just plain ol' pride. Such things as *"Well, we know more now than they used to know."* Or, one I've heard recently, *"Mr. Armstrong never studied into this. And so it's okay (since we know more) to make this decision."* Or, *"Mr. Armstrong didn't have around him the people to give him the information that he needed to make a sound decision."* And so they throw out what he had decided, in favor of their own reasoning.

Another justification: *"Times have changed. We don't need that anymore. We are better now."* Or, *"That's not in the picture any more, and so we can ease off on it—or, we can change it, in this way, to fit the times."* That's another presumptuous justification. And a third one, that may be closest to the idea of presumptuousness that comes forth out of the Bible, is *"Well, we have the authority to do it."* And then they take authority to themselves to make a decision—authority that is nowhere given to them. Like I said, these are presumptuous justifications based on pride, and not on humility.

Now, the second story (about the man who grooms himself and dresses in a messianic fashion) also highlights presumptuousness. He presumes to take on the persona of Christ himself, or (maybe I should say) what he thinks Christ looks and acts like. And, then, once he has this "persona" on him—then he presumes to speak in God's name (in forty-seven states and thirteen countries).

That's quite presumptuous, if you ask me. Did God send him? Did God call him to do that? To dress in a dirty white robe and a scruffy beard, with shoulder length hair, and to walk around the United States and twelve other countries? And preach who-knows-what? Where does he get the authority to do this? Where does it say in God's Word that that's how God's ministers must act? Why does he presume that God wants him to do it at all?

And so, in the church—I always want to bring this back to our present situation, if I can—we have all kinds of "works" that are being done. I don't think that there are any ministers out there who are dressed in a white robe and a scruffy beard, preaching and walking around barefooted. There's nothing like that in the church. But there are different "works" being done by the various groups. Some seem to have the support of the Bible. That is, have the authority of God's Word behind them for what they do.

And others seem to have created these works for themselves, out of thin air—where there is **no** biblical authority for them to do what they are doing. Or, they have taken quite a few devious turns in order to make their reasoning seem plausible, for why they do such things.

Some works focus on preaching the gospel; and that's certainly biblical. Some works focus on feeding the flock; and that, too, is certainly biblical.

Some build a work around making a witness to the world. Others seem to have made their one doctrine "church government," and that's all they seem to preach about and force on the people. Others are all wrapped up in the calendar and the new moons. They are the church of the one doctrine, or church of the new moon, or church of the calendar.

There are groups out there where all they talk about is prophesy. There are those who think that the church's function is only as an outreach to the poor and the needy of the world. And there are others who spend all of their time in aspects of Christian education (rather than being churches). Has God sent these people (or these groups) to perform these functions? Or, is it presumptuousness on their part?

I'm not going to answer that. I'll leave that up to you to decide. And, ultimately, it's up to God to decide. But let's turn to Jeremiah 23, and start looking into the Bible, at this area of presumptuousness. When I started studying this, I was very surprised to find out how often it comes up. Not necessarily the word "presumptuous" (or "presumptuousness," or "presumptuously," or "presumption"), but the idea of it. It is often masked by such words as "proud" and "arrogant."

Jeremiah 23:16 Thus says the LORD of hosts: "Do not listen to the words of the prophets who prophesy to you. They make you worthless; they speak a vision of their own heart, not from the mouth of the LORD.

Now, the word "presumptuous" has not been said. But that is exactly what he is talking about—because they are doing a work, they are saying words, that He didn't put in their mouth to say. It's a vision of their own hearts.

Jeremiah 23:17 They continually say to those who despise Me, "The LORD has said, "You shall have peace.'" And to everyone who walks according to the dictates [imagination] of his own heart, they say, 'No evil shall come upon you.'"

These are the words of the false prophets—the ones He had not sent. And they are telling the wicked (the people who despise God) that there will be peace, and everything is going to be okay. But listen to God's response. This starts a bit of a diatribe on God's part.

Jeremiah 23:18 For who has stood in the counsel of the LORD, and has perceived and heard His word?

What He is saying is, *"Which one of these false prophets has ever come to Me, and been in My counsel, and heard what I said?"* And the answer is, rhetorically, *"None!"* That's the sense of this. The sense of this is *"none of these have stood in My counsel."*

Jeremiah 23:19 Behold, a whirlwind of the LORD has gone forth in fury—a violent whirlwind! It will fall violently on the head of the wicked.

He's talking about a tornado that He has sent—a violent windstorm. Now, remember that the false prophets have said, *"No bad is coming."* And God says, *"Do they ever listen to Me? I've said, 'I'm sending a whirlwind, and it's going to fall on the heads of the wicked.' How dare they say that everything is going to be okay!"*

Jeremiah 23:20 The anger of the LORD will not turn back until He has executed and performed the thoughts of His heart. In the latter days you will understand it perfectly.

In the latter days, do we understand it perfectly? What God is performing and executing right now, throughout His whole plan? Or, are we presumptuously saying that everything is going to be okay? That we are all right, that we are spiritual, that we are on God's good side, that we have God's favor? Now listen to what He says:

Jeremiah 23:21 "I have not sent these prophets, yet they ran.

"I've had nothing to do with them," God says. "Yet they went on their own, presumptuously, to speak in My name."

Jeremiah 23:21-22 I have not spoken to them, yet they prophesied. [They are speaking their own words.] But if they had stood in My counsel, and had caused My people to hear My words, then they would have turned them from their evil way and from the evil of their doings."

What is *the work* that God says needs to be done in the latter days? "**Turn the people from their sin, and back to God.**" It's a message of repentance. That is, a message of returning and then strengthening the relationship that we have with God. "In the latter days, you will understand it. Not only will you understand what needs to be done; but you'll also understand **why** it needs to be done, and do it"—because what good is "understanding" if it is not done?

So it seems to me—This is my own opinion; I want to make that clear—that any other kind of work at this time is either window dressing, or contrary to the will of God, and presumptuous.

Once again, I want to make sure that I bracket that with the thought—with the admission—that this is my own personal opinion, because God's fury will not be held back. It will descend upon us, if we are not doing that work—to return people to God. That's what Jeremiah 23:16-22 seems to say to me, if you believe (if I believe) that we are living in the latter days. And I believe it!

Before we go on any further, let's define "presumptuous," or "presumptuousness," or "presumption." One of those is an adjective (presumptuous) and the other two are nouns.

This is out of *Webster's New World Dictionary*, for **presumptuous** (the adjective). It means "too bold or arrogant [meaning excessively bold or

arrogant], taking too much for granted [That's an interesting one], showing over confidence [and, normally, it's over self-confidence.], and showing arrogance or effrontery."

Sometimes people understand synonyms a little better. So I'll give you a list of synonyms for **presumptuous**. Arrogant, proud, bold, brazen, impertinent, audacious, pompous, pretentious, rash, self-assured, conceited, insolent, egotistic, self-reliant—a very interesting set of words. Arrogant, proud, bold, brazen, impertinent, audacious, pompous, pretentious, rash, self-assured, conceited, insolent, egotistic, and self-reliant.

All this time, I've been trying to find a good differentiation between the verbs "assume" and "presume"—because sometimes we get them confused. They are very much alike. But I think I've found a simple way to differentiate it. To assume is to suppose something to be true. You assume that I will be giving the sermon every third Sabbath of the month. You suppose it to be true. To presume is to suppose something *with confidence* — to be confident about something that you suppose; and then, it has the connotation of *to act upon it*. It is not only to assume; but it means to assume with confidence and then to act.

Both of them are based upon supposition! Not upon fact, but upon supposition; and the one is stronger than the other is. **Assume** is just to suppose; but **presume** is to suppose with confidence and then to take action.

Presumption, then, (or, presumptuousness) is the arrogant attitude of one who confidently assumes a thing to be true and then acts upon it.

It is taking upon oneself the authority to do something that (1) he has either not been given to do at all or (2) has been given to another one.

Let's use a colloquial term that I'm sure you will all understand. It is *getting too big for your britches*. Or, in Britain they might say it is *rising above your station*. That is, it is going outside the bounds of your position. It is taking upon oneself the duties and the prerogatives of another—normally, one with more authority than you. And I should say, finally, it is a very serious sin.

Let's go back to Numbers 15. I think that this "sin" aspect of it really needs to be understood. These are the laws of the offerings (here in Numbers). And God decides, when He is giving this to Moses, that He needs to show Moses how He (God) differentiates between "unintentional sin" and "intentional sin."

Numbers 15:22-29 'If you sin unintentionally, and do not observe all these commandments which the LORD has spoken to Moses— all that the LORD has commanded you by the hand of Moses, from the day the LORD gave commandment and onward throughout your generations [Notice: This is a "forever" type of thing.]—then it will be, if it is unintentionally committed, without the knowledge of the congregation, that the whole congregation shall offer one young bull as a burnt offering, as a sweet aroma to the LORD, with its grain offering and its drink offering, according to the ordinance, and one kid of the goats as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for the whole congregation of the children of Israel, and it shall be forgiven them, for it was unintentional; they shall bring their offering, an offering made by fire to the LORD, and their sin offering before the LORD, for their unintended sin. It shall be forgiven the whole congregation of the children of Israel and the stranger who dwells among them, because all the people did it unintentionally. And if a person sins unintentionally [Notice: This is a person, not the whole congregation.], then he shall bring a female goat in its first year as a sin offering. So the priest shall make atonement for the person who sins unintentionally, when he sins unintentionally before the LORD, to make atonement for him; and it shall be forgiven him. You shall have one law for him who sins unintentionally, for him who is native-born among the children of Israel and for the stranger who dwells among them.

Now, God says that when there is an unintentional sin done in Israel— whether it is done by a whole group of people (a whole congregation) or just one person—that they have a certain offering that they need to bring. The priest shall offer it, and God will forgive them. Okay. Clear on that? It's pretty simple. Now, verse 30. Here's the other side of the coin:

Numbers 15:30 But the person who does anything **presumptuously**, whether he is native-born or a stranger, that one brings reproach on the LORD [on the Eternal].

Remember that Jesus said something about sinning against the Holy Spirit. This is very similar type of wording. Peter mentioned lying to the Holy Spirit.

Numbers 15:30-31 [That one brings reproach on the Eternal] and he shall be cut off from among his people. Because he has despised the word of the LORD, and has broken His commandment, that person shall be **completely cut off**; his guilt shall be upon him.

Where was the offering, the sacrifice, for this sin? It wasn't there. There was **no** offering, or sacrifice, for the presumptuous sin. The person, who **presumed** in his sin, (1) despised the Word of the Lord, (2) brought reproach to the Eternal, and (3) he died in his guilt. That's a very serious situation.

Notice that it doesn't say that he will be "cut off" from his people. It says that he will be "completely cut off" from his people. That is, done—finished. ***There's no sacrifice for presumptuous sin*** . So, do you see what I mean when I say it's a **very serious** sin?

This contrast here—between ***unintentional*** and ***intentional*** sin—helps define what Presumptuousness is. It's not a complete definition, but it helps to define it. ***Presumptuous sin*** is intentional. It is willful. We use words like "bold" and "brazen" and "audacious." Those are ways that we could think of this. It is doing something arrogantly, rebelliously, defiantly.

Remember it says that it brings despite on God's Word. And, if we commit such a sin, we are doing it in defiance of what God has said. (What we **know** God has said.) I have here in my notes that it is being headstrong, and haughty—no matter what God has said on the matter. It is just pushing "our agenda" right on through, no matter what God may have to say on it. We could say, it is taking matters into our own hands and "damn the torpedoes."

In the sense that there is no sacrifice (or atonement) for this type of sin, there is a link there to 'the unpardonable sin.' But I don't want to leave it there, because it is much broader than that. Much broader! That is far too simple just to say that it is a sin that cannot be repented of (as most of us seem to consider 'the unpardonable sin').

There may be contrition after a presumptuous sin like this, and God may not forgive it. I'm glad that He is the Judge, because I don't know how to judge matters like this. But when we are talking about something done arrogantly, willfully, in despite of God's Word and bringing reproach upon God Himself—then you are talking of very serious guilt. Will the blood of Christ erase such despite? I don't know. That's why I said, *"I'm awfully glad God is the Judge."*

But, from everything that I have read about presumptuous sin, I've never seen any mercy! Paul said, in Hebrews, that a man died at the testimony of two or three witnesses. How terrible the punishment to one that brings despite to the Son of God, and exposes Him to open shame. I'm glad that God is the Judge.

Let's look at this because we want to keep adding more of these factors to it. This is the first part of the Old Covenant, and this topic is brought up again—except the word is not presumptuousness in this case. This is concerning murder.

Numbers 21:12-13 "He who strikes a man so that he dies shall surely be put to death. However, if he did not lie in wait, but God delivered him into his hand, then I will appoint for you a place where he may flee.

This is talking about the cities of refuge, and manslaughter. Or, it even goes into the blood vengeance—where, let's say, somebody from my family kills somebody from another person's family. Then, the avenger of blood from that family could come and slay either the person who murdered from my family or one of equal stature to the one who died. If he did that, he could then flee to the city of refuge; and he would have to stay there until the death of the high priest. Then he would be guiltless. That's just the way they worked with things in ancient Israel—with the avenger of blood.

But this also covers accidental murder as well—meaning manslaughter. For example, if you would run over somebody with your chariot, you could flee to a city of refuge because you did not lie in wait. It was an accident. It was something that you did not intend to do. So, you could go to a city of refuge; and you would stay there until the death of the high priest.

Exodus 21:14 But if a man acts **with premeditation** against his neighbor, to kill him with treachery [guile], you shall take him from My altar, that he may die.

Remember that, if they wanted mercy, they would go and grab the horns of the altar. God says, *"I don't care who he is. If he acted with premeditation, you loosen his grip on those horns, and you go out and kill him. He gets no mercy."*

Now, this word premeditation is the same word that is elsewhere translated *presumptuous*. I think that in the King James Version it is actually "presumptuously." And in the New King James, the marginal reference is also "presumptuously."

So, we have to add this idea of **premeditation** (intent). We saw this a little bit in the "intentional sin," but this kind of adds to it. Lying in wait with craftiness—that's the element of planning, or setting out with a purpose to do it. Often times, it's not done emotionally. It is something where one sits down and plans to sin—no matter what.

Now, let's go back to the book of Numbers. We'll be flipping back and forth throughout the Pentateuch as we go through this. In chapter 14, this is the time when they were sitting there, on the border of the Promised Land. The spies had come back. They heard the report of both Joshua and Caleb, as well as the other spies (who were against going back in). And everybody said, *"Oh, no. We won't go in."* But God says, *"Why not? You should go."* But they didn't do it, and they rebelled against God. Then there was a group that decided that they could go anyway. This is the story of that group.

Numbers 14:39-40 Then Moses told these words to all the children of Israel, and the people mourned greatly. And they rose early in the morning and went up to the top of the mountain, saying, "Here we are, and we will go up to the place which the LORD has promised, for we have sinned!"

It almost sounds like they are trying to be contrite. They are putting on a facade of being repentant. They are trying to make up for what they did wrong on the previous day, when they refused to go into the Land. But there are some times when you just can't go back; and this is one of those times.

Numbers 14:41 And Moses said, "Now why do you transgress the command of the LORD?"

Now, what was God's command? His command was, *"You will wander thirty-eight more years in the wilderness, and your bodies will be strewn all over the place. And, since you refused to go into the Land, I'm not going to allow you to go in at all. The next generation will take your place."* And Moses says that their futile attempt to go into the Promised Land is refusing the command of the Lord. (Disobeying. Transgressing.)

Numbers 14:41-45 For this will not succeed. Do not go up, lest you be defeated by your enemies, for the LORD is not among you. For the Amalekites and the Canaanites are there before you, and you shall fall by the sword; because you have turned away from the LORD, the LORD will not be with you. But they **presumed** to go up to the mountaintop. Nevertheless, neither the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD nor Moses departed from the camp. Then the Amalekites and the Canaanites who dwelt in the mountain came down and attacked them, and drove them back as far as Hormah [and they died].

Was there any mercy, on God's part, for this presumptuous sin? Nope! And I wanted this scripture in here, because it adds something very important. They were warned. They were told explicitly that what they were doing was

a sin. They were told explicitly what would happen. They were told explicitly that God would not be with them. But they went anyway! They **presumed** to go up to the mountaintop.

So another thing about presumptuous sin is that it is *continuing proudly in the face of advice (and warning) to the contrary*. What we see here is that presumptuousness can be *rash* on the one hand, and quite *premeditated* on the other. But the constant concept behind these things is pride, and arrogance, and defiance, self-importance, and self-reliance.

It's an ambitious "*go get 'em*" attitude—you are going to succeed in what you want to do, *come hell or high water* (to use a colloquial phrase). No matter what happens, you are going to carry through on your plan—even if God Himself should say, "*Don't do it!*"

Deuteronomy 17 is a whole section on judgment and justice in the Israel system. This is another interesting area that I think we Americans excel in—and it's a bad thing. What this talks about is, on the one hand, making judgments (like a civil court, or an ecclesiastical court) and accepting them, on the other.

Deuteronomy 17:8 "If a matter arises which is too hard for you to judge, between degrees of guilt for bloodshed, between one judgment or another, or between one punishment or another, matters of controversy within your gates, then you shall arise and go up to the place which the LORD your God chooses.

Now, he's speaking to the local judges. In a town, let's say, or in a county, or what have you. And if they have a matter that they can't quite figure out, then they are supposed to take it to a higher court—which was, then, the place where God put His name.

Deuteronomy 17:9 And you shall come to the priests, the Levites, and to the judge there in those days.

So we have the religious side of this, and we also have the civil side. The priests and the Levites were the religious side. The judge was the civil side.

Deuteronomy 17:9 And inquire of them; they shall pronounce upon you the sentence of judgment.

They will make the decision. They are trained in these matters.

Deuteronomy 17:10 You shall **do** according to the sentence, which they pronounce upon you in that place which the LORD chooses. And you shall **be careful to do** according to **all** that they order you.

So God is saying here that if this judgment does go (1) to the main judge and (2) to the ecclesiastical authorities around the tabernacle (i.e., the priests and the Levites) and when they make a decision, then EVERYBODY (the authorities and all the parties involved, in suing or whatever) is to accept that decision. And God says, "*Be careful to do according to everything that they order you.*"

Deuteronomy 17:11 According to the sentence of the law in which they instruct you, according to the judgment which they tell you, you shall **do**; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left from the sentence which they pronounce upon you.

This is the same sort of thing that He tells **us** about following His law. We are to go neither to the right hand nor to the left.

Deuteronomy 17:12-13 Now the man who acts presumptuously and will not heed the priest who stands to minister there before the LORD your God, or the judge, that man shall die. So you shall put away the evil [person] from Israel. And all the people shall hear and fear, and no longer act presumptuously.

Wow! As Americans, we find that hard to take. I wouldn't doubt that a high percentage of the verdicts that are given in this country are appealed almost automatically. No one, it seems, is willing to *submit to the judgment* ! But God says, right here in the law (Deuteronomy 17) that whatever is judged—by those who are in authority to do so—should be taken. IF you fight it (IF you will not accept it), THEN you are acting presumptuously—*because you are defying the authority that was put in place by God Himself!*

We just heard this last week, didn't we? God is Sovereign. God is the Authority over all. He governs everything. Sometimes, He puts the basest of men in positions of authority; but He "passed on" them. Or, He might have even put them there, personally. If such people should make a judgment that goes against what we think is right, we have to take it.

I think that this is where Peter got what he did back there in I Peter 2. He says that if you are suffering (or, you are being persecuted) for righteousness sake and you take it patiently, then you get high marks from God—because that is exactly what He wants us to do. No matter what the decision that a judge should make, if that's the one he makes, then we are to submit to it. That's righteousness. That's the proper attitude.

Now, this was not an Appeals Court. I just wanted to make that clear. This was not something that the plaintiff, in the case, could take to a higher court. It was the judge himself who had to say, *"This is too hard for me. I'm going to pass this up to a higher court."* It's a little bit different from our own system; but it's the principle that I want to get out of this. IF the priest, or the judge, should make a decision—THEN the godly thing to do is to **submit to it**. And He says, *"If you don't (if you rebel against it), then you are presumptuous."*

Let's go to Exodus 18. This is even before they get to Sinai. This is the time when Jethro comes back to Moses. He brings Moses' wife (Zipporah) and the two sons with him. They meet; and Moses tells him what has gone on, since they had last seen each other.

Exodus 18:8-11 And Moses told his father-in-law all that the LORD had done to Pharaoh and to the Egyptians for Israel's sake, all the hardship that had come upon them on the way, and how the LORD had delivered them. Then Jethro rejoiced for all the good which the LORD had done for Israel, whom He had delivered out of the hand of the Egyptians. And Jethro said, "Blessed be the LORD, who has delivered you out of the hand of the Egyptians and out of the hand of Pharaoh, and who has delivered the people from under the hand

of the Egyptians. Now I know that the LORD is greater than all the gods; for in the very thing in which they **behaved proudly**, He was above them."

My margin (here in the New King James), on verse 11, says that what Jethro really said was *"for in the very thing in which they acted presumptuously, God was above them."* That is, God showed Himself *superior* to them.

Remember I just mentioned that it is God who determines who rules over nations, and which nations rise and fall. He is Sovereign over all human government; and He sets whomever He wants in power. And, not only that, He is also over His own people. Right? He's the Judge. He's the Sovereign. He is the real King of Israel—or, the church. He is the Head of the church, as well.

Here Jethro calls what Pharaoh and the Egyptians did presumptuousness. Why? Because they disobeyed the command of God, who spoke through Moses. Moses said, *"The Lord said, 'Let My people go.'" And Pharaoh presumptuously said, "Who is this lord, that he should tell me what to do? The people will not go."* And he also told Moses, *"Because you have said this, they will make brick without straw."* That was presumptuous, because who was Pharaoh's "Lord"? God Himself! Who was the Egyptians' "Lord"? God Himself! They didn't know it; but their actions were presumptuous against Him.

Pharaoh even went so far as to put himself in competition with God. Now, that's presumptuous!

Another little facet of presumptuousness, that I wanted to put in, is when we put ourselves in competition with God. And we can do this by saying that what **we** think is just as good as what God thinks; and what we desire is just as good as what God desires. Boy, are we on a slippery slope when we do that!

Another thing that the Egyptians and Pharaoh did is that they *presumed authority* over Israel that they didn't have, because who was Israel's "Lord"? Not Pharaoh and not their Egyptian taskmasters, but God Himself. (There are a lot of different things coming in here.)

There's one more I want to put in here, before we get to an example or two.

Deuteronomy 18:20 But the prophet who **presumes** to speak a word in My name, which I have not commanded him to speak, or who speaks in the name of other gods, that prophet shall die.

Here is another time when there is no mercy for someone who does something presumptuously. Did God show mercy on the Egyptians? No, not at all. They had ten plagues that they went through. Their firstborn were killed. Then their army goes tearing after Israel, and it gets wiped out. God had no mercy on Egypt; and He took them from the highest power in the world at that time and put them exactly at the lowest power in the world. They didn't recover from that for something like three generations.

And now, here we have this example of a prophet, who presumes to speak in God's name; and God says, "*That prophet shall die.*" ***There's no mercy for a preacher who presumes to speak in the name of God, or in the name of another god*** . God says, "*I don't want anything to do with this person. Cut him off.*"

et's go to what may be the most well known example of presumptuousness in the Bible. I chose two of them actually. But I think this one, because it is about a human, is the easiest for us to understand. This one is the example of Uzziah, who is also known as Azariah. I want to show you the beginning of his reign, just quickly.

II Chronicles 26:1-5 Now all the people of Judah took Uzziah, who was sixteen years old, and made him king instead of his father Amaziah. He built Elath and restored it to Judah, after the king rested with his fathers. Uzziah was sixteen years old when he became king, and he reigned fifty-two years in Jerusalem. His

mother's name was Jecholiah of Jerusalem. And he did what was right in the sight of the LORD, according to all that his father Amaziah had done. He sought God in the days of Zechariah, who had understanding in the visions of God; and as long as he sought the LORD, God made him prosper.

This is someone who knew a lot about God, and he followed God. He had good teachers. (Now this Zechariah is not the same one who wrote the book of Zechariah. This was another prophet.) This was a king who was a pretty good king. He reigned for fifty-two years. That's usually a fairly good sign that he's an okay guy. It's not always, but God often lets the good guys reign for a long time—for the sake of His people. And Uzziah was a pretty good king, for a while. Let's go to verse 16, because something began to work within Uzziah; and it wasn't toward the better.

II Chronicles 26:16-17 But when he was strong his heart was lifted up, to his destruction, for he transgressed against the LORD his God by entering the temple of the LORD to burn incense on the altar of incense. So Azariah the priest went in after him, and with him were eighty priests of the LORD—valiant men.

I get the impression that they went in armed, because this king was invading their space—God's space.

II Chronicles 26:18-19 And they withstood King Uzziah, and said to him, "It is not for you, Uzziah, to burn incense to the LORD, but for the priests, the sons of Aaron, who are consecrated to burn incense. Get out of the sanctuary, for you have trespassed! You shall have no honor from the LORD God." Then Uzziah became furious; and he had a censer in his hand to burn incense. And while he was angry with the priests, leprosy broke out on his forehead, before the priests in the house of the LORD, beside the incense altar.

That shows you how far he had gotten. He had gotten into the inner sanctuary, and was standing before the incense altar—which itself stood right before the curtain that went into the Holy of Holies. That was how far Uzziah got, before the priests stopped him. And God allowed him to get that far.

II Chronicles 26:20-21 And Azariah the chief priest and all the priests looked at him, and there, on his forehead, he was leprous; so they thrust him out of that place. [He was defiling the temple—the holy place.] Indeed he also hurried to get out, because the LORD had struck him. King Uzziah was a leper until the day of his death. He dwelt in an isolated house, because he was a leper; for he was **cut off** from the house of the LORD.

What did I say about God's reaction to presumptuous sin? There is **no mercy!** He immediately struck him with leprosy; and the man was cut off. It sounds like he was cut off from just about everything for the rest of his life. He pretty much lost his crown—lost everything. Lost his health, because he sinned presumptuously.

Ambition is **not** a trait that impresses God—certainly not *presumptuous ambition*. He is looking for a humble man, who will stay where God has put him and do what he is told (That is, what God says.). Uzziah was king over God's people Israel. Wasn't that enough? No! To Uzziah, he wanted to be the priest, as well.

It was his strength (it says in verse 16), his pride. His heart was lifted up within him to make him think that he was worthy of more than what God had given him. And he became discontent with his place. He was dissatisfied with what God had given him (his position as king); and he took to himself something that was somebody else's.

God would never give him the authority to be a priest. He was a Jew; and the law says that only a son of Aaron could be a priest—a Levite. And Uzziah knew that! But in spite of all the warnings, all of what God says, and in spite of what the priests themselves told him—he did it anyway.

Isn't it interesting that he was struck with leprosy *in his forehead*? Now, that should tell you something. What does leprosy stand for? What is it a symbol of? Defilement! It is a symbol of uncleanness—of being impure. Remember in the Pentateuch, all those rules about if somebody had a spot then they were to remain outside the camp? And they were to wash and do all these

things. Well, that was leprosy that they were looking for. And all the things that they had to do—all the washings, all the inspections and everything—were to certify that that person was clean, or unclean.

And God put this uncleanness—this mark of defilement—right on Uzziah's forehead, where he couldn't hide it. Now, what's right behind the forehead? The mind is the seat of intellect. Actually, it's the seat of our character. That's where it's all being stored. That's where we think. And God put this mark on this man's forehead to show that his character had been defiled—by presumptuousness, by this overweening pride that he was greater than what God had made him.

This is why presumptuousness is such a terrible, damnable sin—because *it defiles character* that has been built. It ruins it, to the point that God cannot work with it any more. He says that person shall be cut off from His people. There is no sacrifice for this kind of sin. That's how serious presumptuousness is.

This is the same sin that turned the archangel Helel (commonly known as Lucifer) into Satan the devil. You know what it did to him. He decided that being an archangel—walking among the stones of fire, being full of perfection and beauty, having music created in him, being full of those stones and precious stones, being one of the cherub that covers—was not good enough.

He had one-third of the angels under him and the planet Earth (where God's plan would unfold) and that wasn't good enough for him. He presumed that God had not created him in the right position. He presumed that he had the power and the strength to take on God himself. He presumed that he could rule this universe.

And what does God say? Did God have mercy on this Helel? No. He said, "*I cast him back to the earth.*" Almost like a backhand and here he's been ever since—defiled by *presumptuous sin*. Is there going to be any atonement for him? This is pretty serious stuff that we are talking about here—the sin that destroyed Satan the devil.

The antidote to presumption is found in I Peter 5:5-7.

I Peter 5:5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders.

Now, it's very interesting that he starts with the young people, because it's an illustration as to how all this works. Just as young people are supposed to submit to their elders, so are **we** to submit in whatever positions we are in.

I Peter 5:5 Yes, all of you be submissive to one another.

Okay, now he even broadens it out some. It's not just whether you are younger (or whatever) than another person, or that you are in a lesser position than another person is. It says *all of you be submissive to all of you*. One another—whatever your rank, whatever your position. Whether you are a toenail on the body, or the left elbow, or what have you. All of you submit to the other.

I Peter 5:5 And be clothed with humility.

There's the second point. Not only are we to submit, but we are to do it in humility. And have it clothed—fully draped over us—because that's the attitude that will keep presumption at bay.

Then he quotes the Old Testament.

I Peter 5:5 "God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble."

That's where the favor will come—to those who are humble. "*God resists the proud*" —that's an understatement! God backhands the proud. God won't even give the time of day to the proud. That's how much He "resists" the proud.

I Peter 5:6-7 Therefore humble yourselves under the mighty hand of God, that **He** may exalt you in due time, casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you.

That's the antidote to presumptuous sin: (1) submitting, (2) being humble, and (3) waiting for God to exalt—**not** taking it upon ourselves, to do it ourselves.

Psalm 75:6 For exaltation comes neither from the east nor from the west nor from the south.

Where does it come from? The only one that he left out is the north—where God's throne is.

Psalm 75:7 But God is the Judge: He puts down one, and exalts another.

That's Who we have to wait on—for promotion, for exaltation, for advancement. We need not go as far as Satan in our desire to be presumptuous. We can be presumptuous anytime we take something upon ourselves that has not been given to us to do. I think that there are probably levels of this. That's why I keep saying that I'm awfully glad that God is Judge. He can sort these things out, and knows the heart.

It would be presumptuous for John Ritenbaugh to do the work of an evangelist, or of an apostle—because that's not been given to him to do. That's why he always been very hesitant about putting himself out there, in any way, because he does not want to feel the back of God's hand for a presumptuous act.

Personally, I think it is presumptuous for anyone to claim to be Herbert Armstrong's successor. Or being the one to carry his work on, in the "spirit" of Herbert Armstrong. Did we not read that Herbert Armstrong himself said: "*My work is finished. Now, get the church ready!*" It seems to me that that is what needs to be done. If the apostle says, "*My work is done. Get the church ready,*" well that's what should be done—until we are told otherwise. We don't want to presume to go in a direction that GOD has not pointed the church.

Presumptuousness is a terrible sin. And you want to stay as far away, from the edge of that cliff, as possible. As we have seen in all these examples, there is *no mercy* for presumption. There is no sacrifice for that sin. So remember that. We are presumptuous any time we take a matter upon ourselves, thinking we know better.

Let's close in Psalms 19. This is where David is extolling the law of God. I want you to think of this, as we go into the Passover season—just about two months away.

Psalm 19:12 Who can understand his errors? [David said.]

Who, among us, really knows how much we sin? Who, of us, is really aware of how vile we are? Who, of us, even knows all the sins he has committed? Or are in the process of committing? Who knows how defiled we are by our flesh? How strong human nature is in us still (after who knows how many years of being in the church)? So David says:

Psalm 19:12 Cleanse me from secret faults.

Cleanse me from the faults that I don't know about, others don't know about, that I've hidden from myself, that I didn't even know were sin. And then he says, in verse 13... Listen to this. He doesn't say "*Cleanse me from presumptuous sin.*" David knew the Pentateuch. He knew Numbers 15 said that there is no sacrifice for presumptuous sin. So, what does he say? He says, "*God, keep me back from **presumptuous sins**. Don't let me even get that far—where I am on the verge of one.*" [Paraphrasing the first part of verse 13.]

Psalm 19:13 Let them not have dominion over me. Then I shall be blameless.

"Yeah, I can be blameless when I'm not committing a presumptuous sin—because there's a sacrifice for that [other] sin." The sacrifice of Jesus Christ can cleanse me from those other sins.

Psalm 19:13 And I shall be innocent of great transgression.

There are two ways that term "great transgression" can be looked at. One side says that it means "many" transgressions, or "much" transgression. But the other side says that, no, it means the worse transgression—*i.e.*, *presumptuous, willful, rebellious disobedience*.

Presumptuous sins are those in which we **rely on ourselves** (our might, our wisdom, our knowledge, our understanding) and **act**, despite what God says on the matter.

As Passover approaches, let us repeat David's heartfelt supplication [from Psalm 19:13]:

Keep back Your servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me.