

## **A Study of Pride (superbia)**

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*C. S. Lewis – “Well, now, we have come to the centre. According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is Pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that, are mere fleabites in comparison: it was through Pride that the devil became the devil: Pride leads to every other vice: it is the complete anti-God state of mind.”<sup>1</sup>*

### **Pride is the Root of all the other Vices**



As Lewis says above, pride is the “anti-God” just as the devil is the “anti-Christ”. Pride says, “I will be my own god, thank you very much.” Pride says, “I will make my own standards and rules and I will be my own judge in everything.”<sup>2</sup> Pride breaks the very first and most important commandment, “You shall have no other gods.”

Peter Kreeft: “Pride is the greatest sin because it is the living heart of all sins. Every sin says to God, ‘my will be done.’”<sup>3</sup>

C. S. Lewis: “There are only two kinds of people in the end: those who say to God, ‘Thy will be done,’ and those to whom God says, in the end, ‘Thy will be done.’”<sup>4</sup>

### **Do you think you’re humble?**

The peculiar thing about pride is that none of us thinks we suffer from it and yet we think nearly everyone else does. Our pride can sniff out other people’s pride from a mile away.

“She’s so in love with herself.”

“He’s so full of himself.”

“I can’t stand how arrogant he is.”

“She can do no wrong.”

“He thinks he’s God’s gift to the world.”

C. S. Lewis: “There is one vice of which no man in the world is free; which every one in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else; and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they are guilty themselves. I have heard people admit that they are bad-tempered, or that they cannot keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they are cowards. I do not think I have ever heard anyone who was not a Christian accuse himself of this vice. And at the same time I have very seldom met anyone, who was not a Christian, who showed the slightest mercy to it in others. There is no fault which makes a man more unpopular, and no fault which we are more unconscious of in ourselves. And the more we have it ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I am talking of is Pride or Self-Conceit.”<sup>5</sup>

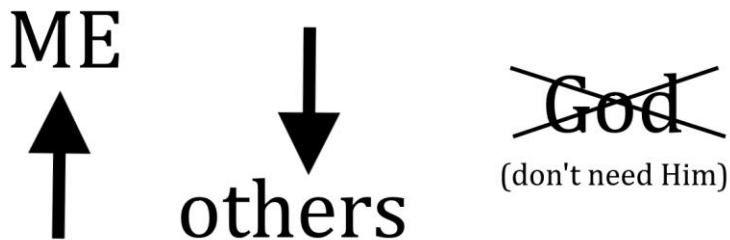
## Why does God care about your pride?

1 Peter 5:5, “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”

Kreeft: “The deepest reason God hates pride, the reason pride is so hellish, is that it keeps us from knowing God, our supreme joy. Pride looks down, and no one can see God but by looking up. Our supreme joy is simply being in God’s presence; and in that presence we are necessarily humble.”<sup>6</sup>

Lewis: “We must not think Pride is something God forbids because He is offended at it, or that Humility is something He demands as due to His own dignity—as if God Himself was proud. He is not in the least worried about His dignity. The point is, He wants you to know Him: wants to give you Himself. And He and you are two things of such a kind that if you really get into any kind of touch with Him you will, in fact, be humble—delightfully humble, feeling the infinite relief of having for once got rid of all the silly nonsense about your own dignity which has made you restless and unhappy all your life. He is trying to make you humble in order to make this moment possible: trying to take off a lot of silly, ugly, fancy-dress in which we have all got ourselves up and are strutting about like the little idiots we are. I wish I had got a bit further with humility myself: if I had, I could probably tell you more about the relief, the comfort, of taking the fancy-dress off—getting rid of the false self, with all its ‘Look at me’ and ‘Aren’t I a good boy?’ and all its posing and posturing. To get even near it, even for a moment, is like a drink of cold water to a man in a desert.”<sup>7</sup>

### How Pride Works:



### But isn't it good to be proud?

Haven't we moderns figured out that pride is a good thing? “And I'm proud to be an American...!” We have parades to show off our pride (gay pride, black pride, etc.) In fact, today pride isn't the sin but the *lack of pride* is the real sin—having a low self-image. That's the real crisis. In fact, if Charles Darwin is right about “survival of the fittest” then pride is the source of all progress. Pride leads to competition which is the heartbeat of evolutionary theory. So only the proudest will survive, right?

Yes, the truth is, only Christians would be so foolish as to say that pride is a bad thing. William Willimon explains:

“Yet, to tell the truth, I can't think of much that is wrong with a healthy—within limits—sense of Pride *except that Jesus was against it*<sup>8</sup>....The rest of the world, uninformed by the story of Jesus,

considers Pride an essential characteristic of the well-functioning personality. Christians are taught to be more suspicious<sup>9</sup>....What the world calls "self-esteem," Christians sniff out as idolatry, self-worship<sup>10</sup>....But for those of us who are following the way of Christ, stumbling along after him, to be sure, but still following, then our Pride...is the first sin that we must consider and confess. Our Pride is part of our self-deceit, our lying about our real situation....And we would not have had such a problem with ourselves, would not have had to worry so much about a matter like Pride, had we not been encountered by Jesus, the One who told us not only the truth about ourselves but also the truth about God. He told us that we were frail creatures who react to our immortality in inappropriate ways, who find ourselves gods of our own liking who promise to pump us up to appropriate size and durability. All of our strutting about, our preening and positioning, is only a kind of backhanded validation of the strong biblical truth that we are created as dust and to dust we shall return (Genesis 3:19)."<sup>11</sup>

Fools will try to use pride to turn people away from other sins. "Where's your pride?" C. S. Lewis says, "Teachers, in fact, often appeal to a boy's Pride, or, as they call it, his self-respect, to make him behave decently: many a man has overcome cowardice, or lust, or ill-temper, by learning to think that they are beneath his dignity—that is, by Pride. The devil laughs. He is perfectly content to see you becoming chaste and brave and self-controlled provided, all the time, he is setting up in you the Dictatorship of Pride..."<sup>12</sup>

**So what about self-esteem? Is it bad?**

Dennis Okholm explains that self-esteem became all the rage after 1970. It was assumed that this was the key for children's success and all things were then geared toward bolstering the self-esteem and self-worth of every child. After the year 2,000, however, psychologists began to question the science (or lack thereof) on self-esteem. It became clear that a high level of self-esteem didn't always equal success. So now the science says there are different *types* of self-esteem, some good and some not-so-good.<sup>13</sup>

The following pictures will help to explain. Just as humility is the good middle between pride and despair, so also self-esteem could be seen as the good middle between narcissism and self-loathing. However, Christians truly have no place for self-esteem as God calls us to find our esteem in Christ and not in ourselves. Don Matzat wrote the book on this, *Christ Esteem: Where the Search for Self-Esteem Ends*.



### **Pride cometh before a fall (Proverbs 16:18).**

God works the opposite of self-esteem and pride. He doesn't use pride to bolster you to good works. (Remember: the devil laughs at that.) God uses the other vices to bring you falling to your knees—to see your pride for what it truly is: sin. God making the proud fall is actually a sign of His grace. He does that for your good. When you are weak (and humble), then you are strong in Christ (2 Corinthians 12:10).

For example, remember the Tower of Babel. In their pride, the people said they would build a tower reaching to the heavens and make a name for themselves. In God's mercy, He came down and "knocked the tower over", so to speak, lest they die in their pride. God works the same on us. He often uses the weaker vices to knock us down and get us looking up to Him once again.

### **The Answer to Pride: Jesus' Humility**

As we will hear this Good Friday, Jesus is the anti-Pride. He is the death of pride. He makes Himself nothing, taking the form of a servant (Philippians 2). We will never be rid of pride this side of the grave. However, the truly humble are those who know their pride and seek forgiveness in our humble Savior.

Kreeft: "That is why Saint Bernard of Clairvaux, when asked what the four cardinal virtues were, replied: "Humility, humility, humility, and humility." If you think you have gotten beyond this single-minded beginning, you are proud; in other words, you have *not* gotten beyond it...Socrates, humblest and wisest of philosophers, was told by the Delphic oracle that no one in the world was wiser than he. He proved this true by interpreting it to mean that neither he nor any other man was wise—"God alone is wise"—but that he alone knew that he was not wise, "and this is the only wisdom I or any other man can have". In other words, there are only two kinds of people: fools, who think they are wise, and the wise, who know they are fools. Augustine's two Cities are the proud, who think they are humble, and the humble, who know they are proud. The only way to become humble is to admit that you are proud."<sup>14</sup>

So the humble know they're proud. Yes, I am. And so are you. But God's Word is clear: Jesus came only for sinners—that is, only for the proud. Every morning we wake up in this world is another morning that we put on our Baptism, drown our pride, and humbly walk with Christ before God our heavenly Father. Every morning we humbly pray, "Thy will be done."

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<sup>1</sup> C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. HarperSanFrancisco, 1952, p. 121-122.

<sup>2</sup> Sayers, Dorothy. "The Other Six Deadly Sins", October 1941.

<sup>3</sup> Kreeft, Peter. *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion*. Ignatius Press, 1992, p. 98.

<sup>4</sup> C. S. Lewis, *The Great Divorce*.

<sup>5</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 121.

<sup>6</sup> Kreeft, p. 102.

<sup>7</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 127-128.

<sup>8</sup> Willimon, William H. *Sinning Like a Christian: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins*. Abingdon, 2005, p. 37.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 46.

<sup>12</sup> *Mere Christianity*, p. 125.

<sup>13</sup> Okholm, Dennis. *Dangerous Passions, Deadly Sins: Learning from the Psychology of Ancient Monks*. Brazos, 2014. p. 160-161.

<sup>14</sup> Kreeft, p. 99.