

Pride: The Root of Evil

By Dr. David A. DeWitt

- *Is pride always bad?*
- *Can I be proud of my children, employees, or team?*
- *Why does the world stress pride over humility?*

Pride the Center of Evil

C. S. Lewis in “Mere Christianity” (page 109) wrote this:

”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.”

It is about pride that the Bible differs most sharply with the world. The world may agree that theft, murder, adultery, and drunkenness are wrong. Unbelievers may even admit to such vices. But I’ve never heard an unbeliever say his sin was pride. I’ve never heard the world (say, in TV programs, movies, books, magazines, or classrooms) declare pride to be evil. “Webster’s Ninth New College Dictionary” (page 947) defines “pride” as “having or displaying excessive self-esteem and having proper self-respect.” The “Oxford Dictionary” has a similar definition. It also defines “humility” as “having or showing a low estimate of one’s importance” (page 397). What is crucial to notice is that the English-speaking world (and probably every language of the world), pride can be a virtue and humility can be detrimental.

In the Bible, just the opposite is true.

Pride and Humility in the Bible

Let’s read some verses from Scripture.

Now the man Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth (Numbers 12:3; see also 2 Chronicles 7:14).

He leads the humble in justice, And He teaches the humble His way (Psalm 25:9; see also Psalm 10:4; 18:12; and 94:2).

Everyone who is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD; Assuredly, he will not be unpunished (Proverbs 16:5; see also Proverbs 8:13; 11:2; 16:18-19; 18:12; and 21:4, 24).

But to this one I will look, To him who is humble and contrite of spirit, and who trembles at My word (Isaiah 66:2b; see also Isaiah 11:13).

He has told you, O man, what is good; And what does the LORD require of you But to do justice, to love kindness, And to walk humbly with your God? (Micah 6:8; see also Daniel 4:28-37).

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven (Matthew 5:3).

Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart; and you shall find rest for your souls (Matthew 11:29).

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant (1 Corinthians 13:4; see also 1 Corinthians 5:2 and 2 Timothy 3:2).

But He gives a greater grace. Therefore {it} says, "God is opposed to the proud, but gives grace to the humble" (James 4:6).

To sum up, let all be harmonious, sympathetic, brotherly, kindhearted, and humble in spirit (1 Peter 3:8).

Five Problems with Pride

(A summary of C. S. Lewis' discussion in "Mere Christianity," pp. 108-114.)

1. Pride is competitive.

Pride gets its pleasure not from having something but from having more of it than the next guy. People aren't proud of being rich or famous or having accomplished career or athletic goals. They are proud of being richer, more famous, and having accomplished more than others around them. Why would someone making \$100,000 a year want to make \$200,000 or a million? Certainly not for materialism. \$100,000 will give us enough stuff to enjoy. Pride wants \$200,000 or a million because it knows of someone making that much.

2. Pride is for power.

Other sins often bring people together. People may enjoy fellowship about their drunkenness or illicit sexual encounters. But pride always divides people (or organizations) because its real goal is power over other people (or organizations). The pretty girl who flirts with men rarely does so for sexual gratification but rather to exercise power over men. The rich man rarely pursues more riches to have more things but for the power he can exercise over people with the money or the things. The pastor with a congregation adequate to occupy his time rarely pursues a larger congregation to have more to do or to receive more money. Rather he often does so to have more power over more people. The world calls this a "successful" ministry.

3. Pride makes God serve us.

Pride expects God to answer prayer, heal us, or make us prosperous. But since God is in every sense superior, we are nothing in comparison (Romans 3:23). But a proud person is always looking down on others.

As long as you are proud, you cannot know God

Proud people who say they believe in God have really created an idol in their mind that will give them what they want. To quote Lewis,

"Whenever we find that our religious life is making us feel that we are good--above all, that we are better than someone else--I think we may be sure that we are being acted on, not by God, but by the devil."

(See Luke 18:9-14.)

4. Pride is spiritual.

Many, if not all, other sins come from Satan's and our sin nature perverting the animal nature of our body or personality. But pride is a purely spiritual perversion, coming directly from the pit of hell. Consequently, pride is often used to control other sins. We often keep students, team members, and children in line by appealing to their pride. Lewis says, "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. Later he adds, "Better the frying pan than the fire." Satan has great joy when we trade a lesser evil for the greater evil of pride.

5. Pride puts "self" over everything.

Selfness is a virtue. It pursues the autonomy we have from God. It looks for "well done, good and faithful servant."

Selfishness is a sin. It pursues my autonomy at the expense of others.

Pride is an abomination. It pursues not autonomy but whatever power you have simply because you have it.

6. Pride gives birth to covetousness.

For example, pride is often encouraged in sports and business. That is because people tend to do better against a standard set by the competition. I often compete because I covet someone else's trophy or record or income or position. I might even

compete with myself because I covet a better time, score, record, or accomplishment. I may want to make more money this year, not because I need it but because I covet the sense of accomplishment. All this is based in pride when the standard to reach or beat is found in people (others or myself). Humility, on the other hand, pursues accomplishment which is rooted in God and gives glory to God (James 3:13-17).

Questions and Answers

Q: *Is pride always bad?*

A: Yes. Pride is independence from God. To be proud is to focus on your status or achievements or those of others-- independent of God. You cannot be proud and know God.

Q: *Can I be proud of my children, employees, or team?*

A: Not without sin. You can take pleasure in pleasing others and you can admire what God has done in others. But when that changes to, "There is something great in me that pleases others" or "admire the independent accomplishment of another," we leave God out and tempt them to leave God out.

Q: *Why does the world stress pride over humility?*

A: Because pride succeeds in this life. Humility succeeds in the next life.