

JUNE 2006—*Pride and Prejudice*

In today's political climate, it is not uncommon for Christians to think themselves better than those who are "on the other side," whatever side that may be. Those who hold one political view look down on and excoriate those who hold another view. Further, some of us look down on others because of their particular types of sin—abortion, homosexuality, etc.—while minimizing our own type of sin. In open or hidden ways, we tend to do this—not realizing that doing so demonstrates a wrong view both of God and of ourselves. Worse yet, these false views pose a serious danger to our souls.

C.S. Lewis identifies the danger and sounds a word of warning for our day.

How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up with Pride can say they believe in God and appear to themselves very religious? I am afraid it means they are worshipping an imaginary God. They theoretically admit themselves to be nothing in the presence of this phantom God, but are really all the time imagining how He approves of them and thinks them far better than ordinary people: that is, they pay a pennyworth of imaginary humility to Him and get out of it a pound's worth of Pride towards their fellow-men. I suppose it was of those people Christ was thinking when He said that some would preach about Him and cast out devils in His name, only to be told at the end of the world that He had never known them. And any of us may at any moment be in this death-trap. Luckily, we have a test. 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. The real test of being in the presence of God is, that you either forget about yourself altogether or see yourself as a small, dirty object. It is better to forget about yourself altogether.¹

Are some political positions more consistent with scripture than others? Of course. Are some sins worse than others? Of course. But even if our moral or political beliefs are more explicitly biblical than those "on the other side," it does not mean that we are better than they—only that our sins and stupidities lay elsewhere.

We can begin correcting this problem by comparing ourselves to Christ rather than to our neighbor. When we see our sins in the light of his holiness, we will no longer be able to think ourselves better than anyone else. Rather, we become utterly aware of our great

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Touchstone, a division of Simon & Schuster, 1996), pp. 109-110.

need of God's grace and mercy. We would do well, therefore, to be charitable and gracious to others—even those “on the other side.”

*To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable:
“Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector.
The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: ‘God, I thank you that I am not like other men—robbers, evildoers, adulterers—or even like this tax collector.
I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.’*

*“But the tax collector stood at a distance.
He would not even look up to heaven,
but beat his breast and said,
‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’*

*“I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God.
For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled,
and he who humbles himself will be exalted.”*

LUKE 18.9-14 NIV
