

C.S. Lewis on Pride & Humility

1. The Great Sin: Pride

- a. Why does Lewis call pride the Great Sin?
 - i. Because the Bible paints a picture of pride as the cause of the devil's fall and the means he uses to corrupt Eve ("you shall be as God") and bring about the Fall
 - ii. Because the great moral, spiritual theologians of the church
 1. Beginning with the Desert Fathers
 2. Both Augustine and Aquinas taught that pride was "the essence of sin"
 3. Luther said, "pride is the head, life and very nature of all sin"
 4. Moral and spiritual theology in the Middle Ages - the period Lewis specialized in - offers much commentary on the seven deadly sins, of which pride is the first
 5. Because of the enormous evil it has caused in the world,
 - a. "The Christians are right: it is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began."
 - b. "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." GS

- iii. On a personal level, it was a significant problem in his own heart
 - 1. As is true for most people who are very intelligent, or well-educated, or well-born, or prominent, or wealthy, or powerful, or successful in their endeavors

b. What is the nature of pride?

- i. Indeed, Lewis recognized a good type of pride, found in what he described as "a warm-hearted admiration for someone or something - child, etc.
- ii. He said, "Now what you want to get clear is that Pride is *essentially* competitive—is competitive by its very nature—while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or cleverer, or better-looking than others. If every one else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest. . . . Nearly all those evils in the world which people put down to greed or selfishness are really far more the result of Pride...it is Pride—the wish to be richer than some other rich man, and (still more) the wish for power. For, of course, power is what Pride really

enjoys: there is nothing makes a man feel so superior to others as being able to move them about like toy soldiers. . . . If I am a proud man, then, as long as there is one man in the whole world more powerful, or richer, or cleverer than I, he is my rival and my enemy." GS

- iii. "Pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense. . . . The real black, diabolical Pride comes when you look down on others so much that you do not care what they think of you."
- iv. Spiritual pride is especially dangerous, "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"
- v. Biblical definition
 - 1. In the Bible, both the Hebrew and Greek words for pride come from roots which mean, "to be lifted up, either literally or figuratively"
 - 2. self-importance, self-exaltation...selfish ambition
- c. An example of pride from Narnia
 - i. Jadis (Magician's nephew)
 - ii. Rebellion of devil, Eve, all
- d. What are its effects?
 - i. Lewis said, "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."

- ii. Pride blinds the mind, hardens the heart, brings self-deception and often leads to contentiousness leads
- iii. It also leads to disgrace - Dick Morris

2. The Liberating Virtue: Humility

- a. Lewis saw humility as the greatest virtue and the foundation of the moral life
 - i. In this, he follows Scripture, and is in complete agreement with Augustine, who said, "Humility is the foundation of all the other virtues hence, in the soul in which this virtue does not exist there cannot be any other virtue except in mere appearance."
- b. What is humility?
 - i. Lewis said it is not a low opinion of one's talents and character but rather self-forgetfulness.
 - ii. Hebrew and Greek words convey the idea of lowering oneself, abasement, affliction
 - iii. John Wesley puts it well: "a right judgment of ourselves which cleanses our minds from those high conceits of our own perfections and from the undue opinions of our own abilities and attainments."
- c. Why is humility so important?
 - i. Because the proud person cannot grow in knowing God, nor in Christlikeness - will remain stagnant
 - ii. Because those who exalt themselves will be humbled by God and those who humble themselves will be exalted by God.
- d. What is a humble person like?
 - i. "Do not imagine that if you meet a really humble man he will be what most people call "humble" nowadays: he will

not be a sort of greasy, smarmy person, who is always telling you that, of course, he is nobody. Probably all you will think about him is that he seemed a cheerful, intelligent chap who took a real interest in what you said to *him*. If you do dislike him it will be because you feel a little envious of anyone who seems to enjoy life so easily. He will not be thinking about humility: he will not be thinking about himself at all."

- ii. A humble is becoming increasingly God-centered and Neighbor -centered and less self-centered

e. How can we develop humility?

- i. "If anyone would like to acquire humility, I can, I think, tell him the first step. The first step is to realize that one is proud. And a biggish step, too. At least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means you are very conceited indeed"
- ii. "In fact, if you want to find out how proud you are the easiest way is to ask yourself, 'How much do I dislike it when other people snub me, or refuse to take any notice of me, or shove their oar in, or patronize me, or show off?'"
- iii. Biblically, the idea is to lower one's view of oneself to that which is appropriate
 - 1. "For by the grace given to me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought but rather think of

yourself with sober judgment (Ro. 12.3).

2. Sober realism about who we are, what we are, from Whom our gifts and abilities ultimately come.
- iv. Prayer for God to help us see our pride and forsake it and to desire humility and pursue it
- v. Concluding word of encouragement; We must persevere in our fight against pride and our cultivation of humility, "Humility is not a grace that can be acquired in a few months; it is the work of a life time." Fenelon

"Yes, God has been v. good to me and allowed my work to reach more people than I would have dared to hope. But I always remember that He can preach thro' *any* instrument -- Balaam's ass is the example I keep in mind."