

“THE SIN OF PRIDE”
Sinning Like a Christian #2
Proverbs 1:20-33, Luke 12:16-21, I Peter 5:1-6
September 11 & 12, 2021

We’ve begun our study of sin and the deadly consequences of it upon our hearts. We’ve come to understand that sin is really a Christian thing, since when we live according to the ways of the world, Satan has convinced us that there is no such thing as sin. So to recognize sin is really a part of the Christian faith, and though we are confronted by that sin, we are offered a remedy of that sin through Jesus Christ.

Last week we came to hear about the seven deadly sins of early Christianity – Pride, Envy, Wrath, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony, and Lust. While each of these at first glance do not look to be very deadly, we are looking at just how insidious they can really be, especially when joined together with one another. So in our investigation of the seven deadly sins, we start with the foundational sin of Pride as the #1 sin. It’s interesting that Pride being the #1 sin is predominantly because Pride always sees itself as #1, over anyone or anything else. And that is the main reason for it being so deadly. Let me give you an example of what I mean.

“For two months in 1988, Orel Hershiser was perhaps the best pitcher ever. From late August through the World Series, he had an ERA (earned run average) of 0.60 and led the Los Angeles Dodgers to an improbable world championship. A Christian for only a few years, Hershiser spoke of his Savior in interviews and knelt on the mound in thanks after one World Series victory.

“But this wasn’t the first time that Hershiser had thrown so well. While pitching in the minor leagues at San Antonio a few years earlier, he had also fashioned a 0.60 ERA going into June.

“I got caught up in the scouting reports, what I read in the papers, and the phone calls from the Dodgers,” he recalls. “I stopped praying. And I stopped listening to God. I started going out with the guys and not really having a focus on what I was supposed to be doing.”

“By the time he was done with his next three pitching assignments, Hershiser’s ERA had ballooned to 8.60. “It was like God had come down from heaven and hit me over the head and said,

“You dummy. Remember who got you here. Remember where your abilities come from.””¹

Pride is the sin of thinking more about ourselves than we ought to think, making ourselves look bigger and better than those around us to the point that we only focus upon ourselves. We become the most important one in our sphere of influence. We become the only one we need to think about. We become the #1 in our life to the exclusion of everyone else. We become the most intelligent person in the world. And we begin to believe that there is no one greater than we are, so others need to treat us with great respect and honor.

Pride makes us think that we are more than we really are. Many people in our society today are so puffed up with Pride that they really believe they are better than anyone else. They may be in music, on TV, in the movies, in politics, in leadership positions of companies, even in churches. Pride works to convince us that we are more important than we really are.

“Convicted for possession of drugs, lead singer of rock the band Stone Temple Pilots, Scott Weiland, talked to *Rolling Stone* about how being in jail impacted his life:

“Weiland keeps repeating the word humility. ‘It’s not me thinking less of myself,’ he says. ‘It’s me thinking of myself less. A lot of my ways of thinking have backfired on me. My stubbornness. My pride. My arrogance. The difficult thing is that those defects of character become assets in my business, the rock and roll world.’

“It’s great being a rock star,’ he crows. ‘But you know what? Being a rock star doesn’t give you the license to view yourself as more important than anybody else. And if I am to become a better man, a man who has some compassion and humility instead of just expecting people to understand me, that doesn’t make me less of a rock star.’”² He had let Pride get the better of him.

But we have a bit of a problem. Pride in our world today has become more of a virtue that many hold close to themselves. We teach our children to take pride in what they do so that they do a good job with it. **We try to instill a healthy self-worth** in their lives so that they are confident, self-assured

¹ (PreachingToday.com, *More Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 2003] pg. 67-68)

² (PreachingToday.com, *Perfect Illustrations*, [Wheaton, IL: Tyndale House Publishers, 202] pg. 32-33)

individuals who are no longer timid and insecure, but assertive and sure of themselves. Pride can drive us toward excellence in what we do, inviting us to give it our best with hard work and diligence. Pride gives us that sense of achievement so that we feel good about what we've done. These attributes to Pride seem to outweigh the poisonous byproducts of excessiveness to this emotion, so we begin to treat Pride as more of a virtue for our lives. We see the importance of self-respect, self-esteem, self-confidence and self-ascribed dignity in people's lives, and that can be a good thing.

But unless we take care, unless we be very careful, Pride easily turns onto arrogance, egotism, vanity, and conceit. Then, **the virtuous aspects of the nature of Pride take us to the dangerous sin that it is, making Pride a vice that destroys the lives of so many more around us.** And it is then that Jesus' reminder to us to "*Love the Lord Your God with all your heart, all your soul, all your strength, and all your mind; and love your neighbor as yourself*" (Luke 10:27), becomes reduced only to *love yourself*. When we focus only upon ourselves, neglecting the focus on loving God and loving others, then Pride leads us to do the most horrendous things, not only to ourselves, but also to others. Our world becomes reduced to only one, and that one is ME.

We hear the warning from the Apostle Paul in the book of Romans 12:3. He tells us, "*For through the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think more highly of himself than he ought to think; but to think so as to have sound judgment, as God has allotted to each a measure of faith.*"

We also heard the warning in Proverbs 1:20-33. **Solomon warns us about disregarding Wisdom,** for when we refuse to hear her call to us, when we go our own way and abandon reason and knowledge, it will not be long for us to find ourselves in dangerous and difficult situations. Wisdom calls out to us, "*You have ignored all my advice and have not been willing to let me correct you. So when you get into trouble, I will laugh at you. I will make fun of you when terror strikes – when it comes on you like a storm, bringing fierce winds of trouble and you are in pain and misery. Then you will call for wisdom, but I will not answer you. You may look for me everywhere, but you will not find*

me” (Prov. 1:25-28). When we are so filled with Pride in ourselves, we give up wisdom, and we find ourselves making horrible decisions that lead us into great troubles.

You see, **Pride seeks to make us our own gods**. Pride brings the focus only to ourselves, limited, ignorant, wanting, and yet determined that we are always right. We lift ourselves up above everyone else, thinking that no one else can do what we do, yet forgetting that we are only human with inadequacies and imperfections and weaknesses and shortcomings. Pride makes us believe that we are the best of the best, the greatest who has ever lived, and the one who knows all things. And it is not long before we have the mindset of the Nazis, full of national exceptionalism and Pride. And then we begin to believe that we can treat others with contempt and hatred, and even derision. And we begin to see the results of our mindset in things like riots, murder, religious persecution, and outright war.

When Pride gets its grip on us, we are often led into making some very bad judgements.

We’re the best there is, after all, so we cannot admit to any fault or mistake, because we’re bigger, better, smarter, stronger and more important than everyone else, so how could we possibly do anything wrong. Pride makes us feel invincible, makes us think we can do whatever we want, and convinces us that all we do is healthy and good.

Will Willimon states like this, “The person who thinks himself as a genius is on his way to some really stupid mistakes. The warrior who thinks of himself as invincible isn’t a warrior for long...Author Richard Thaler, a renowned economist, notes that some of our greatest successes are a prelude to some of our worst failures. He studied gamblers in Las Vegas and found that their greatest losses usually followed their biggest wins. The gambler got on a winning streak, thought that he was lucky, that he was a genius at gambling, so he bet a huge stake and lost it all. Likewise the business person who has a string of business successes begins to think that he or she is a genius at finance, that the prosaic principles of good business practice don’t apply to them. Then comes the downfall. **This is ‘the winner’s curse,’ the way that the biggest ‘winners’ often end up as the biggest ‘losers.’** *‘Pride goes*

before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall' (Proverbs 16:18).³

When we think we are beyond correction, failure is sure to come upon us. When we think we have it made, destruction usually comes our way. Proverbs 1 has the right words for us, “*You have never had any use for knowledge and have always refused to obey the Lord. You have never wanted my advice or paid any attention when I correct you. So then, you will get what you deserve, and your own actions will make you sick*” (1:29-31). Pride brings destruction to all who let it rule their lives.

Yet, **Pride is so hard to avoid**. It is instilled in us every day – it’s in school, in TV shows, in movies, in our churches, in our work-places, in our politics, in the news. It’s gotten to be that Pride is seen as a very good thing, and we are encouraged to lift ourselves up, and make ourselves look good, and be the best, and never show a weakness. Even to the point of putting someone else down, or making someone else look worse than we are, all to make us look better. And that’s where troubles begin, because we make ourselves our own #1 and we forget that God is the only one who has the right to be in that place.

But once more, when we look at **Pride, it only a sin as we look at Jesus’ example**. When Jesus tells us that the two greatest laws are to love God and love one another, we quickly see that Pride distorts those two laws. All of the Seven Deadly Sins are radical distortions of love. “Pride is otherwise admirable self-love...gotten out of hand, love that ought to be given only to God, given to the self as if the self were God...[Pride is] **misdirected love, as love perverted and misapplied**. This points to the insidious, subtle quality of much of our sin. If sin were a matter of performing some self-evident, obvious wrong, then we would never be sinners. Yet sin is rarely self-evidently bad. It takes training, analysis, and much living and reflection, prayer, and quiet consideration to be a sinner. One must be taught to sin – that is, to know sin when one does it. The rest of the world, uninformed by the [accounts] of Jesus, considers Pride an essential characteristic of the well-functioning personality.”⁴

³ (William Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005] pg. 36-37)

⁴ (*Sinning Like A Christian*, pg. 41)

So **Pride sets us up for self-worship**, making ourselves an object worthy of praise and glory and honor. What may start out as healthy “self-esteem,” we see turns into idolizing the self and putting ourselves into the place that only rightfully belongs to God. And we get into trouble every time we put ourselves in the position of making ourselves better than anyone else.

We see it very early in the Old Testament of the Bible. Adam and Eve fell to Pride when Satan tempted them to disobey God and eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Satan told them that they would “*become like God*” when they ate of it, so they pridefully thought that God must be holding out on them (Genesis 3). Pride is what led Cain to murder his brother Abel because he resented the fact that God accepted Abel’s sacrifice above his own (Genesis 4). Pride initiated the building of the Tower of Babel, where the people were desirous of building a tower that would reach Heaven and make a name for themselves (Genesis 11). Pride is Satan’s way of enticing us to “be like God,” so we continue to strive to make a name for ourselves.

But the **Jewish people have two major beliefs** that help them combat Pride. The first belief is “**there is a God**.” And the second belief is “**You are not it**.” So what’s in it for us if we follow these two beliefs? Well it comes to us in Micah 6:8, “*He has showed you, O man, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*”

Jesus gave us a great parable to help us see the danger of Pride in our life. Luke 12:16-21 is the **Parable of the Rich Fool**, who looked at all that God had supplied him with in the harvest and presumed that he had done it all by himself. **He took the credit for the abundance of the crops** rather than giving thanks to God for them. And when there was still much more of the harvest than what he could store at that time, instead of sharing the abundance with those around him who were in need of it, he said to himself, “*I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, where I will store the grain and all my other goods. Then I will say to myself, Lucky man! You have all the good things you need for many years. Take life easy, eat, drink and enjoy yourself!*” **Pride made him the only one he was willing to look after**, so he was in danger of losing it all. He worshipped only himself, and he lost it all.

Pride is turning away from God to worship ourselves instead. Without a belief in God, without knowing the Lord Jesus Christ, Pride becomes a virtue and we begin to wrongly worship ourselves. But “If there is no God, then Pride can be a healthy, creative response to the emptiness of the world.”⁵ Is there any wonder then that the world wants to eliminate all Christianity? Is there any wonder that the Bible has been put on the “hate crimes” list? Christians are the ones that call sin a sin, and that puts everyone else out to be sinners. Without Christians then anything can go and be called a virtue.

But there is a remedy for Pride; it is to heed Wisdom’s call. Listen again, “*Inexperienced people die because they reject wisdom. Stupid people are destroyed by their own lack of concern. But whoever listens to Me will have security. [They] will be safe, with no reason to be afraid*” (Proverbs 1:32-33).

You see, **we will all die and decay**, for we are human, flesh and blood that only lives a few short years before our life ends, for “*we are dust, and to dust we will return*” (Genesis 3:19). It’s not something that we look forward to, but it is reality. However, those who put their trust in Jesus Christ know that this life is not all there is to living. When Jesus is the Lord of our life, when He is our Savior, we are promised to join Him in His Father’s house in Heaven to enjoy eternal life. While our bodies waste away, our spirits will continue with Him in the presence of God.

Those who live by Pride’s rules work to serve themselves, strive to build empires and corporations, industries and nations, but ultimately they only work for themselves. They talk big, but their words are only a monologue rather than a dialogue. They are empty, self-made, have self-accrued great abundance, but in time the undertaker will be called to take them away, and God will have only two words for them, “Thou Fool!” **We only have control of who we make the god of our life.**

Jesus tells us that we must become like little children, vulnerable, meek, empty, relying upon God to feed them, clothe them, nurture them and guide them. We cannot enter the Kingdom of God by

⁵ (Willimon, *Sinning Like A Christian*, pg. 45)

being self-sufficient, self-reliant, and self-secure. We can only enter as the meek, the humble, the poor, the ignorant and the empty little child fully reliant upon God. We must give up Pride and learn to stoop so far as to become the servant who washes feet. **We must humble ourselves before the Lord.**

So I Peter 5:1-6 is an important lesson for us. Listen to these words (READ I Peter 5:1-6).

Pride is unavoidably present in our world today. We are surrounded by it, but we need not fall prey to its luring call. We need to turn a deaf ear to Satan's call and rather than serve ourselves only, we need to "*Humble [ourselves]...under God's mighty hand, so that He will lift [us] up in His own good time*" (I Peter 5:6). **We need to make the Lord God Almighty the #1 in our lives and humble ourselves to be in His service,** doing what we can to minister to the needs of those around us. Pride only works in us as we look only at ourselves, but when we begin to look out at the needs of others, we have the opportunity to become the servants of God.

Each time we have communion, we come before the Lord with empty hands, seeking the Lord's blessings, desiring the Lord Jesus to fill us, and renew us, and forgive us, and restore us. **When we come to Him empty, then He has the chance to fill us up with His goodness.** But if we come before Him full of ourselves, there is nothing that God can give to us, for our hands are full of all that we are and all that we have done. We must humble ourselves, empty ourselves of all Pride, so that He might fill us, open-handed even as we are.

And in that way **we can become like Jesus,** "*Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made Himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself and became obedient to death – even death on a cross*" (Philippians 2:6-8)!

Seek Jesus' forgiveness today. Confess the Pride in your life that is separating you from God and from one another. Remember that "*The Son of Man came to seek and to save what was lost*" (Luke 19:10), the sinners in need of His grace. "*You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly*" (Romans 5:6) so that we might become pure and holy once more. Only

then can we be both a sinner and a justified, forgiven sinner in the service of the Lord. Let's pray.

Father, thank You for Jesus, who modeled for us the way You desire us to live among one another. It is not your desire for us to make something of ourselves, for You have already done that for us. Instead, we are to let You become the Lord of our life, so that we might humbly serve You in all that we do. Give us the courage to confess the Pride in our lives, to recognize it's deadly hold on us and to give it up, so that we might have a relationship with You again. Help us to depend upon You for all that we are so that You might use us for Your glory. Convict us Lord! Call us once more to become Your servants, for this we pray in Jesus' Name. AMEN.