

# The Great Sin (Reading)

by C.S. Lewis

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*Pride is the ultimate vice that leads to enmity with God and others, and humility is the key to spiritual growth and a relationship with God.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 6:33, Romans 12:3, Philippians 2:3, 2 Timothy 3:4, James 4:6, 1 John 2:16

**Topics:** "Audio Books"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker addresses the issue of pride and conceit in the Christian life. He emphasizes the importance of recognizing our need for repentance and seeking the Lord. The speaker references C.S. Lewis and quotes various Bible verses to highlight the dangers of pride and the importance of humility. He poses three important questions for self-reflection and encourages listeners to regularly examine their Christian walk. The sermon concludes with a reminder to be dependent on Jesus and to humble ourselves before Him.

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## Transcript

In my life, Lord, be glorified, be glorified. In my life, Lord, be glorified today. Hello, and I'd like to welcome you in the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ.

For the next few minutes, I'd like to share something very, very important with you. It's from the book, Mere Christianity by C.S. Lewis. It's entitled, The Great Sin.

Today, I come to that part of Christian morals where they differ most sharply from all other morals. There is one vice of which no man in the world is free, which everyone in the world loathes when he sees it in someone else, and of which hardly any people, except Christians, ever imagine that they're guilty of themselves. I've heard people admit that they're bad-tempered, or that they can't keep their heads about girls or drink, or even that they're cowards.

I don't think I've 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 in ourselves, the more we dislike it in others. The vice I'm talking of is pride or self-conceit. And the virtue opposite to it in Christian morals is called humility.

According to Christian teachers, the essential vice, the utmost evil, is pride. Unchastity, anger, greed, drunkenness, and all that are mere flea bites 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. Does this seem to you exaggerated? If so, think it over.

I pointed out a moment ago that the more pride one had, the more one disliked it in others. 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? The point is that each person's pride is in competition with everyone else's pride. It is because I wanted to be the big noise at the party that I'm so annoyed when someone else got to be the big noise.

Two of a trade never agree. Now, what I want to get clear is that pride is essentially competitive. It is competitive by its very nature, while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident.

Pride gets no pleasure out 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're not. They are proud of being richer or cleverer or better-looking than others.

If everyone else became equally rich or clever or good-looking, there would be nothing to be proud about. It is in comparison that makes you proud, the pleasure of being above the rest. Once the element of competition is gone, pride is gone.

That is why I say that pride is essentially competitive in a way the other vices are not. The sexual impulse may drive two men into competition if both want the same girl, but that is only by accident. They might just as likely have wanted two different girls, but a proud man will take your girl from you not because he wants her, but just to prove to himself that he's a better man than you are.

Greed may drive men into competition if there's not enough to go around, but the proud man, even when he has got more than he can possibly want, will try to still get more just to assert his power. Nearly all those evils in the world which people put down to greed or selfishness are really far more the result of pride. Like with money, greed will certainly make a man want money for the sake of a better house, better vacations, better things to eat and drink, but only up to a point.

What is it that makes a man with \$40,000 a year anxious to get \$80,000 a year? It's not the greed for more pleasure. \$40,000 a year will give you all the luxuries that any man can really enjoy. It's 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's nothing makes a man feel so superior to others as being able to move them about like toy soldiers. What makes a pretty girl spread misery wherever she goes by collecting admirers? Certainly not her sexual instinct.

That kind of girl is quite often sexually frigid. It's pride. What is it that makes a political leader or a whole nation go on and on, demanding more and more? Pride again.

Pride is competitive by its very nature. That's why it goes on and on. If I'm a proud man, then as long as there is one man in the whole world more powerful or richer or cleverer than I, he's my rival and my enemy.

The Christians are right. It's pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. Other vices may sometimes bring people together.

You may find good fellowship and jokes and friendliness among drunken people or loose people. But pride always means enmity. It is enmity.

Not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God. In God, you come up against something which is in every respect immeasurably superior to yourself. Unless you know God as that, and therefore know yourself as nothing in comparison, you don't know God at all.

As long as you are proud, you cannot know God. A proud man is always looking down on things and people. And of course, as long as you are looking down, you cannot see something that's above you.

That raises a terrible question. How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up with pride, how can they say they believe in God and appear to themselves very religious? I'm afraid it means that they're 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 penny's worth of imaginary humility to him and get out of it a dollar's worth of pride toward 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're far 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's better to forget about yourself altogether. It's a terrible thing that the worst of all vices can smuggle itself into the very center of our religious life. But you can see why.

The other and less bad vices come from the devil working on us through our animal nature. But this does not come through our animal nature at all. It comes direct from hell.

It's purely spiritual. Consequently, it's far more subtle and deadly. For the same reason, pride can often be used to beat down the simpler vices.

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 an ill temper by learning to think that they're beneath his dignity, that is, by pride. The devil laughs.

He's perfectly content to see you becoming chaste and brave and self-controlled, provided all the time he's setting up in you the dictatorship of pride, just as he would be quite content to see your cold cured if he was allowed to return to give you cancer. For pride is spiritual cancer. It eats up every possibility of love or contentment or even common sense.

Before leaving this subject, I must guard against some possible misunderstandings. First, pleasure in being praised is not pride. The child who's patted on the back for doing a lesson well, the woman whose

beauty is praised by her lover, the saved soul to whom Christ says, well done, are pleased, and ought to be.

For here is the pleasure. It lies not in what you are, but in the fact that you have pleased someone you wanted and rightly wanted to please. The trouble begins when you pass from thinking, I have pleased him, all is well, to thinking, what a fine person I must be to have done it.

The more you delight in yourself, and the less you delight in the praise, the worse you are becoming. When you delight wholly in yourself and don't care about the praise at all, you've reached the bottom. That's why vanity, though it is a sort of pride which shows most on the surface, is really the least bad and the most pardonable sort.

The vain person wants praise, applause, admiration too much and is always angling for it. It's a fault, but a childlike, and even in an odd way, a humble fault. It shows that you are not yet completely contented with your own admiration.

You value other people enough to want them to look at you. You are, in fact, still human. The real black, diabolical pride comes when you look down on others so much so that you don't care what they think of you.

Of course, it's very right and often our duty not to care what people think of us. If we do so for the right reason, namely because we're so incomparably more what God thinks. But the proud man has a different reason for not caring.

He says, why should I care for the applause of that rabble as if their opinion were worth anything? And if even their opinions were of value, am I the sort of man to blush with pleasure at a compliment like a girl at her first dance? No. I am an integrated adult personality. All I have done or have been done to satisfy my own ideals or my artistic conscience or the traditions of my family or, in a word, because I'm that kind of guy.

If the mob like it, let them. They're nothing to me. In this way, pride may act as a check on vanity for, as I said a moment ago, the devil loves curing a small fault by giving you a great one.

We must try not to be vain. But we must never call in our pride to cure our vanity. Like it, let them.

They're nothing to me. In this way, pride may act as a check on vanity for, as I said a moment ago, the devil loves curing a small fault by giving you a great one. We must try not to be vain.

But we must never call in our pride to cure our vanity. Better the frying pan than the fire. Secondly, we say in English that a man is proud of his son or his father or his school or regiment.

And it may be asked whether pride, in this sense, is sin. I think it depends on what exactly we mean by proud of. Very often, in such sentences, the phrase is proud of means has a warm-hearted admiration for.

Such an admiration is, of course, very far from being sin. But it might perhaps mean that the person in question gives himself airs on the grounds of his distinguished father or because he belongs to a famous regiment. This would clearly be a fault.

But even then, it would be better than being proud simply of himself. To love and admire anything outside yourself is to take one step away from utter spiritual ruin. Though we shall not be well so long as we love

and admire anything more than we love and admire God.

Thirdly, we must not think pride is something God forbids because he is offended at it or that humility is something he demands as due 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 a kind of touch with him, you will in fact be humble, delightedly 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 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 and 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. And fourth, don't imagine that if we meet, or if you ever meet, a really humble man, he will be what most people call humble nowadays.

He will not be sort of a greasy, smarmy person who is always telling you that, of course, he's nobody. Probably all you will think of him or think about him is that he seemed to be a cheerful, intelligent man who took a real interest in what you said to him. If you 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. 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 the biggest step, too, at least, nothing whatever can be done before it. If you think you are not conceited, it means that you are very conceited indeed.

In closing, I would like to share a couple of things that Jesus said and that the Apostle Paul tells us also. Jesus had much to say about the basic pattern of pride as it applied to individuals. For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, fornication, theft.

He said in Mark chapter 7, and he included pride in a list using a Greek word which means a heart lifted up against God and man. The New International Version translates the word as arrogance rather than pride. And there are many warnings against pride.

For in 1st Timothy 3.6, Paul warns that an elder must not be a recent convert lest being lifted up with pride, he may fall into the condemnation of the devil. The word here means puffed up. In other words, he might get the big head.

In 2nd Timothy 3.4, Paul again uses the very same word when he declares that the last days men's will be swollen with conceit. The word pride occurs frequently in the Proverbs. Pride goeth before destruction is a familiar passage and it continues, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

1st John 2.16 tells us, For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but of the world. This topic is of great importance to the Christian. And I believe the next three questions that I'm about to ask you, you should make note of and place in your

Bible.

And then once a week, or maybe once a month, look at them and ask them yourself. And see if you can give the answers that I'm about to give you for where you are in your Christian life. Each time that you look at these questions.

And here they are. First, who am I? Answer, I'm a servant of Jesus Christ. Second, am I independent? No, for servants are dependent.

Their world does not revolve around themselves and their interests, but around their masters. And last, should a servant assume himself to be more important than those with whom he comes into contact with? Answer, if so, he's not very good at servanthood. I believe that each of these are very important for the Christian to look at.

And now, as we close with the praise album, a song called Humble Thyself. Meditate and think and pray. Ask the Lord yourself.

For as C.S. Lewis said, if you think that you're not conceited, it means that you're very conceited indeed. So my friend, my brother and my sister in Christ, seek the Lord at this moment. You may have need to repent, as I did.

And then rejoice, for you've just learned a very valuable and important lesson in your Christian life. This is the end of Side 2 and the end of this cassette. If you would like a copy of this tape or other tapes from our catalog, simply write to Firefighters for Christ at 8866 Barcelona Plaza, Westminster, California.

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