Seven Deadly Sins: Pride

Pride has been described as ‘pride is inordinate self-esteem arising out of self-centeredness,’ (Paul Sands, Baylor University). As with most sins, it is a corruption of what is good, and self-esteem is a good thing. As Sands argues, ‘There is a proper self-esteem that is the result of evaluating oneself with “sober judgment” (Rom. 12:3). It is not based on stock portfolios, beauty contests, or social prominence; it is the fruit of a clear-eyed assessment of one’s own character and achievements’ ([117031.pdf (baylor.edu)](https://www.baylor.edu/content/services/document.php/117031.pdf)). If we are good at something, we should be able to recognise that and to thank God for it. We should be able to take a compliment without feeling awkward about it – though some of us may not find this an easy thing to do. Why is that, do you suppose?

But if we feel good about something we have done, when and how does that tip over into pride? It can be easy to stray across the line. Pride causes a disparity between how we see ourselves and how we view other people: we big ourselves up and put others down. As Sands puts it, ‘The proud are “full of themselves”—“puffed up” or “inflated” with self-importance. They fantasize about being “larger than life” and fear nothing more than shrinking in power or visibility. Proud people assert themselves and disregard the opinions and needs of others. They resent any boundary that constricts their freedom to act as they wish.’ It’s easy to spot pride in someone else! It can be harder to detect pride in our own lives, simply because pride’s first line of defence is to diminish our awareness of our own shortcomings. That’s why praying and meditating on Psalm 19:12-14 can help deliver us from the sin of pride.

Paul calls people to humility and uses Christ as an example in Philippians 2:1-11. We tend to read Philippians 2:5-7 as a reference to the incarnation, but there are those who argue that Christ’s humility here reverses the sinful pride of Adam and Eve, who were made in God’s image, yet sought equality with God (Genesis 3:1-6). Do you find this interpretation of Philippians 2:5-7 helpful? Some people think that pride is the archetypal human sin because it was the reason that Adam and Eve ate the forbidden fruit. Would you agree?

In *Mere Christianity*, C.S. Lewis identified pride as ‘the essential vice, the utmost evil’. It’s been said that women are more naturally inclined to suffer from low self-esteem, and that labelling pride as the greatest of sins can serve to reinforce their sense of inadequacy. Any proud women reading this will probably object to such stereotyping! But are men more prone to the sin of pride than women? Why might that be the case? It’s important to realise that repenting of the sin of pride does not mean that you end up allowing other people to use you as a doormat and to walk all over you. Your inherent worth means that you should be treated with dignity and respect. Pride is about how we appear in our own eyes (Proverbs 21:4) and about how we treat other people (Proverbs 21:24); it is not about how we let other people treat us. Why not take some time to reflect on this? Does it strike you as true and helpful?

Proverbs has quite a bit to say about pride. Proverbs 3:34 is cited in James 4:6 and 1 Peter 5:5, so it looks like an important verse. Pride is also contrasted with humility in Proverbs 11:2; 18:12; 29:23. Can you think of times when you have seen this kind of contrast between pride and humility worked out in real life? Pride may be about having too high an opinion of ourselves, but that does not mean than humility entails having a low opinion of ourselves. What qualities would you ascribe to the humble person?

Why you think that God hates pride and arrogance, and tears down the house of the proud person? (Proverbs 8:13; 15:25; 16:5)?

There is sound wisdom to be found in Proverbs 13:10! What does this verse have to teach us about our attitude to other people?

‘Pride comes before a fall’ has become of our own popular proverbs. It’s there in Proverbs 16:18-19. Do you agree with what these verses say? If so, why – or why not, if you don’t!

‘Parents are the pride of their children’ is the somewhat surprising claim made in Proverbs 17:6 (NIV). Normally we think of parents taking pride in their children, but Proverbs reverses this, and it’s deeply challenging and difficult: those of us who are parents – how can we make our children proud of who we are?

And while it’s not in Proverbs, a saying of the Spanish Dominican priest, Vincent Ferrer (1350-1419) is worth including here: ‘Whoever proudly disputes and contradicts will always stand outside the door. Christ, the master of humility, reveals his truth only to the humble, and hides himself from the proud.’ The imagery is striking – as you use your imagination to reflect on this saying, what does it convey to you?

When I survey the wondrous cross

On which the Prince of glory died,

My richest gain I count but loss,

And pour contempt on all my pride.

(Isaac Watts)