

# *Pride: The Root of all Sin*

*By John Austin, August 2023*

Pride is considered by many scholars and theologians to be the 'father of all sins,' and the first of the 'seven deadly sins' compiled first by the early church and later by the Roman Catholic Church. Although there is no official list of these sins in scripture, all of the seven sins—pride, greed, envy, wrath, lust, gluttony and sloth—are mentioned in scripture (Proverbs 6:16-19, Galatians 5:19-21).

Pride is the sin that caused Lucifer ('lightbearer') to rebel against God, desiring to be like God and usurp His kingdom. In the process, Lucifer deceived a third of the host of heaven to follow him and be expelled from heaven. Later, after Lucifer (who was given the title The Satan[ accuser]) successfully tempted Eve into sinning in the Garden of Eden, thereby causing the Fall, subsequently plunging humanity into the curse of original sin.

In this seven-part series, I will explore the confusion of distinguishing 'good' pride from the pride we most commonly hear about in scripture: the *cardinal sin* of pride. I will then explore the many 'faces' of pride and its often deceitful manifestations in the human heart and what that might mean for the recovering addict. I'm no biblical expert on sin, just a fellow servant of Christ yearning to understand sin and how best to deal with it by Yahweh's standard.

It is my hope in this exploration that God's grace—through the discernment of the Holy Spirit—will enlighten all of us, myself especially, to the potential threat that pride poses to our relationships with other people, and ultimately, to our walk with Christ.

## *Part One: The Power of Language: Virtue or Sin for the Addict?*

When it comes to discerning virtue from sin, the power of language should never be underestimated.

Famed psychologist, author and speaker, Jordan Peterson, recently said in an interview with popular podcaster Joe Rogan, that, “word meaning is determined by usage,” and that, “the authoritative usage of words is most greatly influenced by fundamental works of literature in the culture, such as Shakespeare, Dante, and Milton. Underlying this great literature is the Bible,” asserted Peterson. He continued by explaining that the Bible is not merely the truth but moreover, “the *prerequisite* for the *manifestation* of the truth.” He further explained that to acknowledge that, “is the only way to solve the problem of perception.”

Profound words coming from an unbeliever, who, at best would hold to an agnostic view of God, possibly on a truth-seeking journey. Yet,

even someone who doesn't profess faith in *any* deity admits that the quandary of perceiving truth can only be resolved by a sound cognizance of the language of the Bible.

You don't have to look far to see that in today's biblically illiterate world of microwave, 'fastfood' information via social media, Peterson's statement rings truer than ever, particularly when it comes to one's view of what constitutes virtue or sin. What we perceive to be truth, echoing Pontius Pilate's question to Christ, can be altered within a generation simply by *amending* the meaning of a word, which, depending on the cultural significance of that word, can steer the very ethos of a generation, like the human tongue can steer the course of a person's life, similar to how a tiny rudder can steer a ship (James 3:4-5).

*Pride* is one of those words, and it can be a tricky one.

Depending on the social and cultural context and its grammatical form, the moral semantics of this verbal chameleon can vary drastically. Since the context of the word can alter its nuance, it is often easy to overlook its darker meaning. This should not be surprising, since pride can be notoriously deceptive, camouflaging itself within the stratum of valid, human emotion and perspective. In the mind of a self-centered person, pride's expression can be a believable lie, and like all believable lies, there is always a vein or two of truth blended in with the deceit, hence the camouflaging.

Nowadays, the word 'pride' seems to be the quintessential buzz word to symbolize overt homosexuality or non-biological gender expression. Indeed, in the parlance of LGBT ideology, the word *pride* has replaced *shame*—a word that embodied much of humanity's moral view of same-sex attraction and gender confusion for centuries across

many cultures. However, what was once considered deviant behaviour best done in secret is now widely accepted and promoted as a morally legitimate sexuality, enshrined in many countries as a human right to be celebrated. In western popular culture, the term 'coming out,' in reference to someone announcing their homosexuality or gender profession to the public, is lauded by the mainstream media as heroic.

Enter the *new* meaning of pride.

This seems to fit well with the ideological commandeering of two other words in the English language – *gay* and *rainbow*. The word 'gay' used to mean cheerful or carefree, drawing from its 12<sup>th</sup> century roots, evolving to mean 'sexually promiscuous' (*heterosexually*) by the 1600s, to becoming synonymous with 'homosexual' from the mid-twentieth century on. As for the word, 'rainbow,' people still know what you're talking about when discussing the concentric, multi-hued arc that follows a downpour, but the rainbow as a *cultural icon* is synonymous with homosexuality and transgenderism. (Never mind that Peruvians also have a rainbow flag that expresses Inca culture. Talk about confusion!)

Indeed it's a sad irony of sin that a sign given to us by God as a reminder of his covenant to never punish humanity again with a flood, would be ethically hijacked by an ideology that mocks His natural order of human sexuality and gender biology. An interesting side note: an *actual* rainbow contains seven hues as compared with the LGBT rainbow which contains only six. To anyone who understands Hebrew alphanumeric symbolism, the number seven represents God while the number six represents man. In view of this, I find the LGBT flag a soulish echo to ancient man's attempt to reach the heavens *without* God, and we know how *that* venture ended, with God

confusing the language of all the builders of that doomed tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1-9).

Another word that is distinguished in the post-modern, moral vernacular, is *orientation*. The implied meaning of *this* word is used to legitimize a person's same-sex attraction, rather than attribute that appeal to perversion. The idea behind the new, politically correct, implied meaning is to promote the view that homosexuality is natural or innate with the person in question, therefore not merely a behavioural choice.

If that's not confusing enough, how about the term, *transsexual*, which is used to indicate the dogma of a scientific fallacy: the 'transitioning' of one gender to another, all in the face of the would-be 'transitioners' unalterable gender DNA and natural hormonal design. Yet, the mainstream media and trans activists proclaim that 'trans' peoples' self-perceptions about their gender identities are valid and should be affirmed by everybody, much like a gay person's 'orientation.' I can only imagine how absurd it would look if alcoholics and drug addicts declared *themselves* to have a valid, behavioural orientation to abuse narcotics, constituting a community deserving of court-backed rights and a parade, marching down city streets carrying alcohol and drug paraphernalia to celebrate their newfound 'pride' in *their* identity.

Yet, societies in many countries are increasingly doing the exact same thing with LGBT ideology, abandoning what was once considered biological and moral truth not so long ago. Of course, this should not surprise those with a sound knowledge of ancient history, when many of the Gentile cultures surrounding Israel promoted sexual perversion in similar ways. Not surprisingly, with the legitimization of sexual perversion came the murder of children in abortion clinics. What was once called 'sacrifice' to the pagan God *Molech* for blessing is

now euphemistically called 'women's reproductive health services.'

The only difference between the ancients and today is *language*. In the axiom of human nature, Solomon's adage, "There's nothing new under the Sun," (Ecc.1:9) is as true today as it was thousands of years ago.

Of course sexuality and gender expression aren't the only elements related to the meaning of pride. In the post-modern age of self-promotion, pride doesn't seem so self-aggrandizing as it might have during the Victorian Era, for example. Twenty-first century ethos doesn't seem to associate pride with conceit or pretention, particularly when applying for a job, auditioning, promoting a business, or enrolling in a prestigious school. In a culture mired in selfism, we're often encouraged to 'sell ourselves' or '*re-invent ourselves*' if we're unhappy with the way we are, but for those of us who profess to follow Christ, is that appropriate, or even godly?

In my experience—and I suspect many others—I've noticed two distinct aspects of pride that most—if not all—would agree exists: pride as a sin and pride as a virtue. When used as a noun, the online *Dictionary.com* defines pride as, 'a high or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit or superiority, whether as cherished in the mind, or displayed in bearing or conduct.' *Webster's Dictionary* defines it as being, 'an inordinate self-esteem and an unreasonable conceit of one's own superiority over others.'

In speaking of pride as a sin, the noun form of the word is most prominent in biblical passages and is considered worse than all other sins. The word of God clearly implies that pride is indeed the root sin of all sins. We see this in Genesis 3:5 where the serpent tempts Eve with self-divinity, becoming 'like God,' discerning good from evil. In

1 Timothy 3:6, the Apostle Paul informs Timothy that a church overseer must not be a new convert because of the susceptibility to conceit, and in 1 John 2:16, we are told the “boastful pride of life is not from the Father, but from the world.” Proverbs 6:16-19 lists pride as the first of all the sins God hates.

For the average person, pride as a sin is often seen when someone brags about their accomplishments or performance in the workplace or at school, while ignoring others' achievements. It can also be manifested in the demanding workaholic whose fanatical perfectionism never seems to be satiated. For the recovering addict, pride as a sin can often lead to the 'dry drunk' syndrome typified in the hubris of self-righteousness that becomes the 'replacement high' for the sober addict who is often miserable in their sobriety. It's too easy to spot this kind of pride in the dry drunk or arrogant blowhard that demeans others in their boastful bellowing and overly negative critique of their peers. Hubris—excessive pride—is an inflated self-view of one's accomplishments or status. This is very negative and unrealistic in that a person fails to give credit to others, and ultimately—hopefully—to God. This has even been confirmed in the secular world, where *hubristic* pride has been distinguished from the nobler form –*authentic* pride. Through experiments conducted by psychology professors, David DeSteno (Northeastern University, Boston, Mass, USA) and Lisa Williams (University of New South Wales, Sydney, Australia) they found their test subjects performing the same whether or not they were complimented. They concluded, as has Miami psychologist Charles Carver, that hubris is more aggressive, with a fragile ego, wanting to conquer others and promote themselves.

Hubris is the 'pride of life' the Bible speaks of, the kind of pride that, “goes before destruction,” with, “a haughty spirit before stumbling.”

(Proverbs 16:18, NASB) Hubris definitely seems to be the most prominent form of pride in scripture. The word 'destruction,' in the original Hebrew, is 'sheber,' and it means a break or breach. The Proverb essentially says that *haughty arrogance* comes before a *breach* between a person and the Lord. Hubris can also affect people corporately, not merely as individuals. The deception in corporately rooted pride comes from group exclusivity as documented in John 8:31-36, where the Jews tell Jesus they have no need of freedom, alluding to their ethnic genealogy stemming from Abraham. We are told that, “Everyone proud in heart is an abomination to the Lord (Proverbs 16:5). A glaring example of hubris can be seen in the gospels, where the smug Pharisee brags to God how righteous he is, comparing himself condescendingly to a humble tax collector (Luke 18:9-14).

Jeremiah, known as the 'weeping prophet' because of his anguish over Israel and Judah's false and insincere worship, failure to trust Yahweh, and the terrible consequences of it, warned not only his national brethren but also the Edomites that their arrogance would inevitably cause God to humble them (Jeremiah 49:16). We are also reminded in Proverbs 16:2, and 21:2, that although we may see ourselves in a positive light, it is the Lord who discerns the *true* motives of our hearts. Jeremiah 9:23-24 tells us, “Let not a wise man boast of his wisdom, and let not the mighty man boast of his might, let not a rich man boast of his riches; but let him who boasts boast of this, that he understands and knows Me, that I am the Lord who exercises lovingkindness, justice, and righteousness on earth; for I delight in these things,” declares the Lord.

Authentic pride, on the other hand, paired with humility, is more supportive of others, seeking the *greater good* of others. This is the kind of pride that these same psychologists say can be a virtue and *not*



a sin. *This* kind of pride can be seen when used as a verb, where it takes on a more congenial or commendable connotation, such as, '*I take pride in my work.*' The same could be said when used in adjective form, particularly when speaking of others, like when parents say to their children, "*I'm so proud of you,*" or when husbands and wives say they are proud of each other, ostensibly when it's for something good about their 'significant other.' The most salient facet of the verbal form that alludes to a righteous or altruistic meaning is that it emphasizes a sense of *other*-centeredness, as opposed to *self*-centeredness. The 'authentic pride' identified by the secularists is really just the honesty of knowing one's talents and abilities—without compliments or flattery—beautifully tempered by the humility of acknowledging others' help in their success. That sounds a lot like how we should see ourselves in *God's* economy of ethics!

Sadly, these secular psychologists see the Bible as being too simplistic about pride, but, like many Christians, they forget that language can alter how a meaning is perceived, particularly in translation. The moral quality of 'authentic pride' could be described by another word, and, like Romeo to Juliet, would still be, "a rose by any other name." (*Romeo and Juliet*, by William Shakespeare, 1597)

So, how *does* that, 'authentic pride' appear in the Bible?

Reverend Keith G. Ball of Delaware Church of Christ, said in an article in the Delaware Gazette's *Your Pastor Speaks* that, "we must recognize that our English language lacks the verbiage to distinguish between 'good' pride and 'bad' pride." That being the case, what Reverend Ball describes as, "intense joy," could be synonymous for *authentic pride*, since there doesn't seem to be a better English equivalent to the Hebrew and Greek of scripture. We see this 'intense joy' where God the Father expresses extreme pleasure over his Son,

Christ Jesus, at his baptism and later, at the transfiguration (Matt. 3:17, 17:5), and also, God's approval of the Christ (Col.2:9). We also see it with the Apostle Paul boasting on behalf of other believers' commitment to the cause of Christ despite tribulation (2 Cor.7:4). Those are similar expressions one would hear from a beaming parent expressing pride in their children, a husband speaking of his wife, or a boss speaking of his employees. Yet, that ugly stigma of guilt somehow seems to handicap Christians from expressing that intense joy.

Again, talk about confusion!

The other form of authentic pride in the biblical accounts can again be found in Paul's appraisal of his limitations: "But He [the Lord] said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for [my] power is perfected in weakness." Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ's sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong." (2 Cor. 12:9,10)

This view of what encompasses 'good' boasting is paramount to having the humility to attribute one's lack of abilities to the grace of Almighty God working through that individual. There is definitely a view by modern psychologists as by medieval Christian philosophers that human beings are really inter-dependant, alluding to our *inabilities* being as important as our *abilities*. That could also be an echo of where the Apostle Paul compares followers of Christ to parts of a body (1 Cor. 12:12-26). This passage seems to point to the truth that people who appear to be weaker or lower in ability are as important as the more obvious members that appear to be more prominent. It's a clear reminder that all of us in the body of Christ

are equally important under God's grace, we all need each other, and there is no room for boasting outside of God's righteousness.

As for addiction treatment, in our baffling world of changing semantics, how recovery happens can sometimes be equally confusing to the addict, in light of the gospel. As we all must remember, we can do nothing without God. This truth is underscored where Christ likens us to branches connected to the vine (Christ), being totally dependant on Him (John 15:5). Honest and careful observation can point to the subtle deception of pride and how it's so easy for a recovering addict to succumb to the temptation to credit their sobriety to *willpower*, becoming the 'masters of their fates [and] the captains of their souls,' as nineteenth-century poet, William Ernest Henley once wrote. While a brilliant poem on overcoming mental and physical impediments, it's still antithetical to the essence of the gospel (John 15:5). Yet, it really *is* so common for any of us—if we're honest about ourselves—to desire credit for our achievements, especially to hear it from people we admire and respect. I've yet to meet anyone who doesn't want to feel good about themselves when they've done something truly worthwhile, like overcoming an addiction. This is notably prevalent with recovering addicts, who, in many cases, feel absolutely rotten about themselves, often for a life scarred from the shame of toxic addiction and the consequences their lifestyle choices entailed. In the language of secular and pseudo-Christian addiction recovery, the notion that being proud of oneself for conquering addiction is a sin can cause moral confusion for recovering addicts who are following Christ. These souls are especially vulnerable to such confusion as they're trying to find freedom from bondage on the one hand, while on the other hand, trying to 'build self-worth' through sobriety, as many peer-support therapies stress.

I can personally attest to that moral confusion in my own journey to

follow Christ and find sobriety.

A good case in point is that whenever the subject of my accumulated 'clean time' has come up, people have told me on numerous occasions that, "I'm proud of you," or, "you should be proud of yourself," to which I always say, "I give all the credit to the Lord Jesus and the amazing people he has put in my life." While I have no difficulty attributing my sobriety to the Lord's grace, I must admit in all honesty, that it *does* feel good to be complimented, as I'm sure anyone would agree. The tricky part about that 'good feeling' lies in our *motives* for doing good things, such as abstaining from sinful vices.

So what *does* that mean to the recovering addict?

It means that the addict must walk a narrow, proverbial passage that all followers of Christ must traverse, lest they fall into the deception of pride, however well-intentioned. Ultimately, it means that we always must examine our motives for everything we do and say, in light of God's truth about the curse of our innate, sinful nature and His remedy for that curse (2 Cor.13:5). That covers a whole gamut of feelings and perspectives, whether we see ourselves as victims or victors, heroes or failures. I can attest to many others in recovery who have fallen, when the 'bad' pride contaminated their hearts and warped their views about redemption. Pride—in all its forms—*has* been the precursor to falling and it has left many casualties in its wake.

In this ongoing exploration of the trickiest of all sins, I'll now look into the various manifestations of pride and how it can be so easily overlooked and even justified, where the deception is greatest.

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