

The Great Sin (C.S. Lewis excerpts)

There is one vice of which no man in the world is free. 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.

The vice I am 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. 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.

Each person's pride is in competition with every one else's pride. Pride is *essentially* competitive - is competitive by its very nature. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.

Greed may drive men into competition if there is not enough to go round; but the proud man, even when he has got more than he can possibly want, will try to get still 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.

Power is what Pride really enjoys.

It is Pride which has been the chief cause of misery in every nation and every family since the world began. But Pride always means enmity (i.e. ill will, hostility) - it *is* enmity. And not only enmity between man and man, but enmity to God.

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 is above you.

How is it that people who are quite obviously eaten up with Pride can say they believe in God and appear to themselves very religious? Luckily, we have a test. 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. 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 is better to forget about yourself altogether.

This does not come through our animal nature at all. It comes direct from Hell. It is purely spiritual: consequently it is far more subtle and deadly. The devil is perfectly content to see you becoming chaste and brave and self-controlled provided, all the time, he is setting up in you the Dictatorship of Pride. For Pride is spiritual cancer: it eats up the very possibility of love, or contentment, or even common sense.

Pleasure in being praised is not Pride. For here the pleasure lies not in what you are but in the fact that you have pleased someone you wanted (and rightly wanted)

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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 do not care about the praise at all, you have reached the bottom. Vanity is really the least bad and most pardonable sort. The vain person wants praise, applause, admiration, too much and is always angling for it. It is 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 that you do not care what they think of you. 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.

To love and admire anything outside yourself is to take one step away from utter spiritual ruin.

And He and you are two things of such a kind that if you really get into any 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 lot of silly, ugly, fancy-dress in which we have all got ourselves up and are strutting about like the little idiots we are. ... the relief, the comfort, of taking the fancy-dress off - 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.

A really humble man (will probably seem like) 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.

To acquire humility, the first step is to realize that one is proud. And a bigish 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.