

*Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*  
by Jerry Bridges

**Session 5: Pride & Selfishness (Ch. 11-12)**

► **Chapter 11: Pride**

- A. Prayer of Pharisee: “God, I thank you that I am not like other men, extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector” (Lk 18:11).
- B. Blind Spots: “One of the problems with pride is that we can see it in others but not in ourselves” (Text, pg. 89).
- C. Certain Expressions of Pride:
  - 1. **Pride of Moral Self-righteousness:** “a feeling of moral superiority with respect to other people” (pg. 90). Jesus told a parable about the Pharisee “to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and treated others with contempt” (Lk 18:9).
    - a. Found in political and cultural realms.
    - b. Found in conservative, evangelical believers.
      - i. Feeling of moral superiority.
      - ii. Disdain or contempt on those who do certain sins.
    - c. C. S. Lewis Quote on Sexual Morality:  
“Finally, though I have had to speak at some length about sex, I want to make it as clear as I possibly can that the centre of Christian morality is not here. If anyone thinks that Christians regard unchastity as the supreme vice, he is quite wrong. The sins of the flesh are bad, but they are the least bad of all sins. All the worst pleasures are purely spiritual: the pleasure of putting other people in the wrong, of bossing and patronising and spoiling sport, and back-biting; the pleasures of power, of hatred. For there are two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.” (*Mere Christianity*, pg. 95).
    - d. Reality Check: No one is naturally morally upright.
    - e. Fight this pride with humility and gratitude for God’s grace.
      - i. David: “Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me” (Ps 51:5).
      - ii. Ezra: “O my God, I am ashamed and blush to lift my face to you, my God, for our iniquities have risen higher than our heads, and our guilt has mounted up to the heavens” (Ezra 9:6).
  - 2. **Pride of Correct Doctrine:** “the assumption that whatever my doctrinal beliefs are, they are correct, and anyone who holds another belief is theologically inferior” (pg. 92).
    - a. Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up (1 Cor 8:1).
    - b. While seeking Scriptural truth and doctrinal convictions, be sure to hold convictions in humility and treat others with respect (pg. 92-93).

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3. **Pride of Achievement:** “failure to acknowledge that any success has ultimately come from God and an inordinate desire for recognition” (pg. 96).
  - a. Scripture teaches a general cause-and-effect relationship between hard work and success in any endeavor (Prov 13:4; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Cor 9:26-27; Phil 3:12-14).
  - b. Success in any endeavor is under the sovereign control of God (1 Sam 2:7; Ps 75:6-7; Hag 1:5-6).
  - c. Reality Check: What do you have that you did not receive? Nothing. Our intellect, natural skills and talents, health, and opportunities to succeed all come from God (1 Cor 4:7).
  - d. Example of Corrie Ten Boom: She took every compliment as a symbolic rose and said, “thank you.” At the end of each day, she would give the bouquet of roses to God in praise.
4. **Pride of an Independent Spirit:** “prideful spirit that expresses itself in resistance to authority and an unteachable attitude” (pg. 97).
  - a. This is a common pride in young people.
  - b. Unwillingness to submit to authority and spiritual instruction of mature Christians (Heb 13:17; Prov 2:1; 3:1; 4:1; 5:1; 7:1).
  - c. Weigh the Wise Counsel of Others: “Where no wise guidance is, the people fall; But in the multitude of counselors there is safety” (Prov 11:14).

► **Dangers in National Pride and Repentance**

*(Condensed from Thesis Introduction: “The Church’s Relationship with Patriotism and Politics: An Evaluation of Francis A. Schaeffer and John Howard Yoder,” © 2008 Joshua P. Berrus).*

It is important to note there are apparent dangers both in national pride and national repentance. These are two perilous extremes that require great caution and wisdom when considering the church’s relationship with patriotism and politics.

**A) To begin, there are inherent dangers in national pride.** The term pride carries many definitions ranging from arrogance and conceit to delight and elation. Scripture is clear: “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (Jas 4:6 ESV). The Lord hates haughty eyes and finds them detestable (Prov 6:16-17). Many theologians consider pride to be a root sin in mankind, and it is the sin which led Satan to rebel against God. Jesus claimed that childlike humility was required for one to enter the kingdom of heaven (Matt 18:3). Since pride carries negative connotation and risk, it would be better for Christians to avoid this word in regard to national identity and utilize terms like gratitude, appreciation, and delight.

**Some words related to pride are *glory* and *boasting*.** According to the prophet Isaiah, the Lord will not share His glory with another (Isa 42:8). All glory, honor, and praise belong to God alone. The only appropriate boasting in

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Scripture is related to one's relationship with the Triune God. The Christian is not to boast about his strength, wisdom, riches, or plans for tomorrow. The righteous individual can boast in the Lord (Ps 34:2; 1 Cor 1:31), boast that he understands and knows God (Jer 9:23-24), boast about personal weakness where Christ's power is seen (2 Cor 11:30; 12:9), and boast in the glorious cross of Jesus Christ (Gal 6:14). All glory and boasting in the Christian life corresponds to one's relationship with Almighty God, and all these boastings hinge upon the cross of Jesus Christ.

**There are some positive examples of the term pride in Scripture, but these would probably be better translated as joy, pleasure, and delight.** The apostle Paul took great pride and delight in the spiritual growth and holiness of the Corinthian believers (2 Cor 7:4). He wrote in the book of Galatians that one can take pride or rejoice in testing his own actions, but this must be done without comparing oneself to others (Gal 6:4). James speaks of Christians in humble circumstances taking pride in their high position and wealthy Christians rejoicing in their low position (Jas 1:9-10). All these positive examples of pride are not founded upon human effort or the glory of man, but instead, are examples of one depending on the Lord and rejoicing in all circumstances.

What matters most are the heart, motivation, and attitude behind the concept of pride. If national pride means that one is thankful to God and delights in a heritage, culture, and identity, this is quite appropriate. If national pride is based on human effort, confidence in the flesh, or boasting in the glory of man, this must be rejected. *Due to its ambiguity and connotation, it is recommended that Christians avoid using the term pride in regard to one's nation and instead employ words such as gratitude, thanksgiving, appreciation, pleasure, and delight.*

**B) Not only are there inherent dangers to national pride, there are also potential dangers to national repentance.** At first glance, this concept may surprise the reader. In contrast to the self-righteousness of England in his day, C. S. Lewis noticed many young Christians naturally turning with hope to the idea of national repentance. In the essay, "Dangers of National Repentance," he wrote: "Repentance presupposes condemnation. The first and fatal charm of national repentance is, therefore, the encouragement it gives us to turn from the bitter task of repenting our own sins to the congenial one of bewailing—but, first, of denouncing—the conduct of others" (*God in the Dock*, pg. 190). This is truly moral cowardice to escape personal repentance by deploring the sin of others.

**Lewis went on to pinpoint some serious sins of the younger generation and encouraged them to be humbly reluctant in preaching national repentance:**

The communal sins which they should be told to repent are those of their own age and class—its contempt for the uneducated, its readiness to suspect evil, its self-righteous provocations of public obloquy, its breaches of the Fifth Commandment. Of these sins I have heard nothing among them. Till I do, I must think their candour toward the national enemy a rather inexpensive virtue.

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Is it not, then, the duty of the Church to preach national repentance? I think it is. But the office—like many others—can be profitably discharged only by those who discharge it with reluctance. We know that a man may have to “hate” his mother for the Lord’s sake. The sight of a Christian rebuking his mother, though tragic, may be edifying; but only if we are quite sure that he has been a good son and that, in his rebuke, spiritual zeal is triumphing, not without agony, over strong natural affection. The moment there is reason to suspect he enjoys rebuking her—that he believes himself to be rising above the natural level while he is still, in reality, groveling below it in the unnatural—the spectacle becomes merely disgusting. The hard sayings of our Lord are wholesome to those only who find them hard (*God in the Dock*, pg. 191).

The Christian must guard his heart from the hazardous extremes of national pride and national repentance. As the pendulum can swing from self-righteousness to condemnation, the Lord calls believers to a life of careful balance marked by *humility, truth, and love*. It is with reluctance and with these precautions in mind that the arena of patriotism and politics can be cautiously entered.

► **Recommended Book – Humility: True Greatness** (by C.J. Mahaney)

A. **Definition of Humility: Honestly assessing ourselves in light of God’s holiness and our sinfulness** (pg. 22).

1. Humility gets God’s attention: “This is the one *to whom I will look*: he who is humble and contrite in spirit and trembles at my word” (Isa 66:2).
2. God gives grace to the humble (Jam 4:6).

B. **Definition of Pride: When sinful human beings aspire to the status and position of God and refuse to acknowledge their dependence upon Him** (pg. 31).

1. It appears that pride was the very first sin (Isa 14:13).
2. Pride lifts up one’s heart against God and “contends for supremacy” with Him (Charles Bridges quote, pg. 31).
3. The motive of pride is to rob God of legitimate glory and to pursue self-glorification (pg. 32).

C. **Greatness Redefined & Demonstrated by Christ** (Mark 10:35-45).

D. The Practice of True Humility:

1. As Each Day Begins: Reflect on the wonder of the cross, Acknowledge your need for God, Express gratitude to God, Seize your commute, and Cast your cares on Him.
2. As Each Day Ends: Avoid cosmic plagiarism (transfer glory to God) and Accept the gift of sleep (Ps 127:2).
3. For Special Focus: Study the Attributes of God, Doctrines of grace (election, calling, justification, perseverance) and sin.
4. Identifying Evidences of Grace in Others: Divine perspective, God is at work and is faithful, Encourage Others.
5. Inviting and Pursuing Correction.
6. Responding Humbly to Trials: Prayer, Waiting, and Rejoicing.

E. A Legacy of Greatness: Teaching children humility thru example.

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► **Chapter 12: Selfishness**

- A. We are all *born with a selfish nature*. Just observe preschoolers at play.
- B. Degrees to Selfishness (pg. 102).
  - 1. Some selfishness may be *crass and obvious* from a person who doesn't care what others think of him.
  - 2. Most people care what others think of them, so selfishness will likely be more *delicate and refined*.
- C. Four Areas of Selfishness:
  - 1. **Selfishness with our *interests***: Self-centered focus on one's concerns, affairs, needs, and subjects of interest (pg. 102-103).
    - a. "Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil 2:4).
    - b. An ugly sin that is characteristic of the "last days" is to be "lovers of self" (2 Tim 3:1-5).
    - c. Question: How much time do you spend talking about your interests compared to listening to others?
  - 2. **Selfishness with our *time*** (pg. 103-104).
    - a. We tend to be selfish by either inordinately guarding our time or unduly imposing on another person's time.
    - b. Reluctance to step outside one's normal responsibilities.
    - c. "Bear one another's burdens" (Gal 6:2).
  - 3. **Selfishness with our *money*** (pg. 104-105).
    - a. Americans, who live in the richest nation in all of history, give less than 2% to charitable and religious causes.
    - b. Heart of Compassion (Rom 12:15; 1 Jn 3:17).
    - c. Stewardship of Finances (Chapter 20).
  - 4. **Selfishness in the trait of *inconsiderateness*** (pg. 105-106).
    - a. Not thinking about the impact of one's action on others:
      - i. Being late and keeping others waiting.
      - ii. Talking loudly on cell phone in public.
      - iii. Leaving messes for others to clean up.
      - iv. Only thinking of yourself.
    - b. Not thinking of the feelings of others:
      - i. Being Rude to waitresses and store clerks.
      - ii. Indifference to others' feelings.
      - iii. Not saying thank you.
    - c. Unselfish Example of Jesus (2 Cor 8:9; Phil 2:5).
    - d. Reality Check: Living unselfishly will cost us effort, time, and money.
    - e. Seek Help: Without being defensive, ask those close to you to point out any tendencies toward selfishness they see in you.

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► **Strategy to Overcoming Sins**

(Text Review from Ch. 6 on pg. 51)

1. Apply the gospel.
2. Depend on the Holy Spirit.
3. Recognize your responsibility.
4. Identify specific sins.
5. Memorize and apply appropriate Scriptures.
6. Cultivate the practice of prayer.
7. Involve one or a few (ideally 3) other believers with you.

**For This Week:**

**Read Chapters 14-16: Impatience, Irritability, and Anger.**

Class Discussion:

Recommended Books:

Bridges, Jerry. *Respectable Sins: Confronting the Sins We Tolerate*. Colorado Springs: NavPress, 2007. (Class Textbook).

Edwards, Jonathan. *Sinners in the Hands of an Angry God*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1992.

Lundgaard, Kris. *The Enemy Within: Straight Talk About the Power and Defeat of Sin*. Phillipsburg, NJ: P & R, 1998.

Mahaney, C.J. *Humility: True Greatness*. Colorado Springs: Multnomah, 2005.

Owen, John. *Overcoming Sin and Temptation*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2006.

Justin Taylor and Kelly Kopic have edited and updated three of John Owen's works in this volume: "Of the Mortification of Sin in Believers," "Of Temptation: The Nature and Power of It," and "Indwelling Sin."

Piper, John. *Spectacular Sins: And Their Global Purpose in the Glory of Christ*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2008.

Piper, John. *When I Don't Desire God; How to Fight for Joy*. Wheaton: Crossway, 2004.

Plantinga, Cornelius, Jr. *Not the Way It's Supposed to Be: A Breviary of Sin*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995.

Sproul, R.C. *The Holiness of God*. Wheaton: Tyndale, 1998.

Tozer, A.W. *The Knowledge of the Holy*. Waynesboro, GA: Authentic, 2008.