

“SEVEN SERIOUS SINS: PRIDE.”

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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Text for the Sermon: Luke 18:9-14

Introduction.

Well, friends, you are in for a treat this morning. I have an awesome sermon, one of my best efforts, no brag just fact. What can I say, when you're as good as I am, it's hard to be humble.

And here is where you start running for the doors to avoid the lightning strike.

Gregory the Great said pride is the root sin, the poisonous root from which all the rest grow.

Jonathan Edwards called it “the most hidden, secret and deceitful of all sins.”

C.S. Lewis called it the great sin and said all the other sins are fleabites in comparison.

Calvin begins his comments on this passage saying simply, “there is no more deadly disease than pride,” it's so deeply rooted in us that it's almost impossible to root out.

Of the seven things God hates pride is the first sin listed in Proverbs 6.

Proverbs 16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

We are starting this morning with the deadliest of the deadly serious sins.

Pride's Portrait, Luke 18:9-14.

Jesus paints the perfect portrait of pride in His great parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector. Jesus chooses these two to represent two extremes in culture.

Pharisees represent those who are moral, respectable, looked up to, people who do what is right, and are very religious. Today He might have said senior pastors or seminary professors.

Tax collectors represent those who are unscrupulous, lacking integrity, without religion. Today Jesus would pick a profession that is notoriously full of scoundrels with bad reputations. Google says the least respected professions today are politicians, lawyers, used car salesmen, telemarketers, and reporters.

If prayers were airplanes, the Pharisee's prayer is so overloaded with self-righteousness and self-congratulation that it never gets off the ground and crashes at the end of the runway.

The tax collector's prayer on the other hand is a light Cessna 150 that gets off the ground quickly and makes it straight to its desired destination.

The Pharisee was so busy justifying himself that he didn't realize that he wasn't justified by God, while the tax collector thinking he had no hope of being justified because of all his great sin, was the one justified by God.

The thing that is especially brash about the Pharisee is that he is boasting to God. Who would dare try to impress God with their own righteousness or godliness? We will do that with each other, before men, but hardly before God.

He thinks he has earned God's grace by what he has done and by what he has not done. And he thinks he is free from the sin that is common to all men and afflicts every soul, the sin of pride.

He boasts he does more than the law requires. Like me saying I pray five times a day and give 20 percent, oh, and I always read more chapters in the Bible than our reading plan suggests.

Jesus exposes two faults. The Pharisee's self-justification based on his own assessment of his goodness and worthiness. And the Pharisee's looking down on and despising of a fellow human.

He sees only good in himself and only bad in others. He doesn't see the evil in his own heart and the goodness of God in the other heart.

Building ourselves up and tearing others down often go hand in hand. If I can't get above you by promoting myself, then at least I can get above you by putting you down.

When you see the sins of others, what are your thoughts? Judgmental, critical? Or do you see a mirror of your own heart?

The Pharisee sees sin the way the world sees sin. It externalizes it, it's out there, it's the big sins pollution, crime, injustice, fossil fuels, carbon footprint, racism, gender equality. Sinners are people who embezzle, murder, oppress, abuse, commit sexual sins. It's easy to throw rocks at that. But this completely misses the real issue.

Matthew 15:19-20 Out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person.

It's easy to see pride in others; it's easy to see the Pharisee's spiritual pride. The more difficult task will be to turn this around and see if we can detect any of these symptoms in ourselves. If we desire spiritual health, we will be earnest in seeking out the sin that is in our own hearts.

Prides Progeny.

Pride has more kids than we can count, but there are a few that are especially well known.

Self-promotion.

You know how self-promotion works. Have I told you about the time I met Mother Teresa? Have I mentioned my nephew plays basketball for Mt. Baker the recently scored the winning buzzer beater basket against Lynden? I have a video clip if you want to see it. I was disappointed the search committee never asked to see my college and seminary grades.

Boasting, flaunting, bragging, name dropping, smugness, patting ourselves on the back, exaggerating, taking credit for ourselves, basically raising a toast to ourselves.

Pride is lust for recognition and approval. It is, as one famous personality put it, desperately trying to win all the little merit badges we can to show our worth, our value, our importance, our acceptance (Garrison Keillor).

Think of all those magazines in the grocery checkout line, all those pretty people with their merit badges telling us how we can get ours. Every magazine, every advertisement, every commercial making an appeal to our pride, our wanting to belong, wanting to be known, to be approved and applauded.

Self-righteousness.

Pride as self-righteousness is a hereditary disease, we all got it from Adam. It's in our blood. We think more highly of ourselves than we ought and can always find others to look down on.

This is the sin of not seeing our need for God, that we are good enough in ourselves.

We fast and tithe. We go to church and give. We serve a bit, do something for others once in a while. We don't cuss or smoke or drink too much, at least not as much as other people. Trying to impress God with our good works.

Self-pity, Self-condemnation, self-degradation, self-demotion.

Pride has another kind of progeny. This is wallowing in our self-pity, stewing over our losses, mistakes, failures, or when others get ahead of us or do better or are more recognized. This is noticing how we have less than others or have it worse than others. Self-pity or pity parties are the funerals we plan for our ego when our pride is wounded.

How many of us mentally push the replay button to rehash failures or disappointments?

The false humility in this is evident when we do it to fish for a compliment or some recognition we deserve.

Pride's Preoccupation, The root of pride.

What do all of pride's progeny have in common? Self.

Now we have this whole new thing called selfies. People used to take pictures of places and people without being able to be in the picture.

"They call them selfies because 'narcissistic' is too hard to spell." (Church Curmudgeon).

Pride says it's all about me. I am the center of my universe. Pride is like one of those black holes out in space, where everything is turned inward, nothing gets outward.

Think of all the words you can add self to. Self-centeredness, self-absorption, self-admiration, self-interest, self-importance, self-congratulation, self-love. In a word, ***self-preoccupation.***

Pride is constantly taking it's temperature, thinking about what people think about them or say about them. Pride is overly concerned with appearances. How often do we look in the social mirror, in the mirror of other's opinions or thoughts of us?

It's everywhere, baking pies, growing a garden, educating my kids, my yard, my car, my clothes or hair, my income, my church, my vacations, my number of friends on social media,

Consider just a few ways to recognize pride in our own hearts.

Do I look down on those who are not as competent or capable as me, who can't do as well what I think is easy? Do I find ourselves looking down on the sins of others? Do I look down on others for how they raise their kids or discipline, or dress, or take care of themselves or their stuff?

Am I easily offended or hurt? React defensively? Irritated when someone corrects me? Find it hard to receive counsel?

When I am praised do I take the credit or do I acknowledge God's grace?

Do I quickly justify myself or make excuses and find it hard to say I was wrong?

Have I lost friendships over wrongs or offenses or petty grievances or competition?

Do I find myself angry or bitter over how I am treated compared to others, or unable to enter into other people's joy or success? Am I hungry for attention?

Do I measure my worth by others around me?

Putting Pride to death.

In the words of John Owen, if we are not busy killing sin, sin is busy killing us. Not to oversimplify killing this hardest sin to kill, let me offer two swords, two bullets.

We must be humbled.

Humility is the chemo that kills the cancer of pride.

We are all proud, we all need the help of the Holy Spirit to begin killing it in all its forms in our heart. The place that begins is at the cross. Only at the cross do we really begin to humble ourselves before God, admit our sin, stop our self-justification and receive His justification.

In simplest terms, humility is being aware of our sins and all our attendant failures, faults, shortcomings, inadequacies. Not groveling in them in a sort of false

humility, but truly knowing the condition of our heart and frankly admitting that and confessing that to God.

The way we gain God's favor and acceptance is by acknowledging that we are not worthy of it. Self-knowledge leads to self-humility. The Pharisee had no self-knowledge, no self-awareness. He acknowledged no need for mercy or forgiveness.

There is no condition of our soul more dangerous than having no self-awareness of how sinful we are. I have met a few of those people and it's truly scary. I have met people that to my knowledge have never once asked someone else forgiveness for something they said or did.

Jesus commends and praises the tax collector's prayer for several reasons. First, it is an actual prayer that asks for something. The Pharisee's prayer asked for nothing. Second, his prayer is personal, it's about him, he didn't talk about others. Third, it was truly humble, he put himself in the right light, "I am a sinner." Fourth, it acknowledges God as the God of mercy. His faith is not in himself, but in God. Finally, his prayer came from the very depths of his heart. He beats his chest in a desperate cry for forgiveness. This is true prayer and true religion and the path to true joy. He went home justified, pardoned, free (points from J.C. Ryle, Luke).

To have true humility means we have to have the right standard for measuring our sin. If we compare ourselves to other people, we will never be humble. If we compare ourselves to God and His holy Word, then we will never be in danger of becoming like the Pharisee.

The true joy of the cross is that we are truly known for who we really are and we are still loved and accepted.

That is how it should be in church, and once in a while we experience it when our worst is seen and we are still loved and accepted. We have a deep desire and need to be both truly known and truly accepted with unconditional love.

Humility makes us real, makes us what we truly are. Sinners become beautiful when they repent and the ugliness of pride falls away. The beauty of heaven is it will be filled with humble, repentant sinners.

Do you know every day that your greatest need in every moment is God's grace? Are you that aware of your dependence?

Humility is self-forgetfulness. Humility is being so busy looking up to God and out to others that it doesn't have time for self.

C.S. Lewis said, "Humility is not thinking less of ourselves, but thinking of ourselves less."

When we empty ourselves of ourselves then there is room for God to work.

We don't have to have the first or last word.

We don't have to get credit or recognition.

We don't have to win.

We don't have to protect our reputation.

We don't have to elbow our way into conversations.

We don't have to justify our existence.

We don't have to always put ourselves in the best light.

We don't have to have the spotlight, we can let it shine on others.

We must boast in what is truly praiseworthy.

How do we want to spend life? Praising ourselves and seeking praise, or praising God?

Whose opinion do we care about the most? Others or God's?

Pride tempts us to glory in ourselves, glorying in God kills that.

What freedom and joy in having God be the center of our universe.

What freedom and joy in having God's unconditional acceptance and approval based on what Jesus has done, and not on what I do or can control or make happen.

Humility is a double awareness, of our sinfulness and of God's glory. In the presence of His glory our sin dies, all self-preoccupation dies. All our boasting in ourselves ceases.

If you must brag, brag in God.

If you must make much of something, make much of God.

Delight in God, make Him your joy and pleasure, not yourself.

Johann Sebastian Bach wrote some of the most incredible and beautiful music in the world. On every manuscript he wrote three letters, sdg, soli deo gloria, to God alone be the glory.

He wanted everything he did to be for the praise of God and not himself.

Implications and Application.

Pride is opposition to God and the only response God has is to oppose the proud. As one pastor put it, other sins lead us away from God, but pride tries to put us above God (Jason Meyer).

Pride in any form is open war against God. It's a battle we cannot win. So the better battle is to wage war on pride. Better to have God as an ally than as an enemy.

As I said last week, the only way this series on the seven serious sins will be fruitful and lead to joy, is if we place no trust in our own righteousness and freely confess our sin and our need for God to root out sin in our own hearts.

When God exposes all the ways pride has infected your souls, don't just despair or be depressed. Flee to Christ for pardon, knowing in His mercy He freely and willingly forgives all our sins and grants us grace to continue the fight against our sin.

Hate pride, hate every form of it. Every time you see it, kill it, speak against it, confess it. Pray against it. Ask God to root it out. Tell God you know your flesh likes it, your natural man wants to hang on to it, but tell God to take it away, expose it, starve it to death.

Psalm 139:23-24 Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!

24 And see if there be any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!

For the sake of your joy, for the sake of God's glory.

Prayer: Holy Father, have mercy on us all. We are so proud we don't even see our pride or think we are proud. Others are but we aren't. And the little bit of pride we see in ourselves and manage to confess is nothing compared to what remains hidden and unconfessed. But we know it is a deadly sin and we harbor it to our own destruction, so expose it, root it out, and grant us the grace and humility to welcome this painful work in our soul.