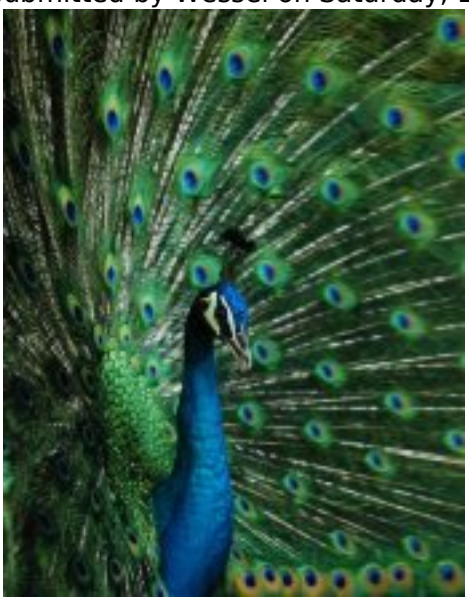
The Root Sin [1]

Submitted by Wessel on Saturday, 15 August 2015 - 14:24



Read time: 8 minutes
In a previous article [2] I discussed what sin is. In this article I am going to explore where it comes from—that is, what Christians commonly understand to be the root sin: the one from which others spring. Conversely, we are going to look at which sin surfaces when all the others are deconstructed.

Many people do not like to talk about sin. Many feel the focus of Christian conversation should rather be on positives and encouragements, whereas speaking about sin is focusing on the negatives and tearing people down. In reality I do not think that an honest discussion about sin is tearing people down: it is the exposing of what *really is* there and which people—all of us—work hard to cover up and hide away from the world. Irrespective of our culture, beliefs or religion, we all recognise wrongdoing within ourselves (let alone of other people), are ashamed of it, and try to cover it. If this really is the case, then surely healing is needed, instead of encouraging people to continue dealing with it in a manner which is not constructive? Yet when the topic of sin is brought up, people feel threatened that the boards could be lifted up, that the curtains could be drawn, and the makeup smudged which was put in place to keep things private. To paraphrase Jesus, our efforts to disguise our sin are neatly kept graves and mausoleums which hide putrid, rotting and decaying corpses; clean and polished cups which are still filthy on the inside and taints whatever is poured into it (Matthew 23:25–28). It is not surprising that one of the teachings of Jesus which perhaps resonates with most people (whether Christian or non-Christian) is "do not judge [someone for their sin]" (Matthew 7:1–2)1. My aim with discussing sin in this (and previous) article is to help with the thinking and self-examination which is needed to be in a right relationship with Jesus.

Without much ado, the root sin in Christianity is held to be *pride*2. This is not a big secret and should not come as a huge surprise.

- Theft means that one thinks some else's right to ownership is less important than one's personal needs and wants (self-entitlement ⇒ pride).
- Betraying someone's trust (whether through lying, having an affair, or going back on a formal agreement such as a contractual agreement) implies that you think that your own circumstance, comfort or preference is more important than faithfulness towards others (self-centredness ⇒ pride).
- Witholding from others to their detriment (such as not helping out the hungry when they ask for help) is a manifestation of selfishness, whether you are being greedy with your money, your time, or both (selfishness ⇒ pride).

- If someone rapes, they believe that their own sexual gratification is more important than the will of another person (self-gratification ⇒ pride).
- Taking someone's life (murder) means that you think their life is less valuable than your own, and that such an act is justified because it satisfies your own desire to express anger, hate or revenge (self-importance ⇒ pride).

As someone once said, "the centre of 'sin' is 'I'". Pride is such a big issue because, as briefly mentioned in the previous article [2], a Christian should have a high view of any other person, regardless of their behaviour or personality, because of who they *are* as an image bearer of God (Genesis 1:26–31).

Pride is an ambiguous word in English. There is such a thing as good pride. However, good pride is usually *other-person centred*, while sinful pride is typically *self-centred*. For example, it is not wrong for a parent to be proud of their child for taking their first step as a baby, or getting a good grade at school, or that your favourite sports team has won a significant game. It is wrong, however, if you think that you or your family is more important or special than others because your child (who has "your" genes) is more intelligent than others when they do well at school. And it is equally wrong to think of your affiliation as being better and more important, and breaking down and belittling others, because of the outcome of a sports game.

All this said, the Christian view of pride is becoming increasingly counter-cultural. Pride of the self is often seen as a *good* thing in the secular world, especially if it is a means to "self-actualisation". The whole LBGT movement rallies around the motto of "pride" ("be proud of who *you* are!"; or, perhaps more accurately, who someones *wants* to be). Some feminists celebrate women who want to be "true to themselves" and act accordingly (such as the story of a mother who left her husband and children [3] to do so). People seem to increasingly yearn for *negative freedom*, while spurring those to hold to *positive freedom*3 (including many Christians). Some people see altruism as foolish instead of noble (or it even becomes illegal [4]). Even how we relate to each other in relationships have become self-serving [5], instead of other-serving (John 13:1–17, Ephesians 5:22–33).

Even the most well-intentioned Christian struggles with sin and, fundamentally, with pride. In a world in which we are called to be in relationships (with other people and with God), we need to recognise that our problems, 99% of the time, essentially arises from pride and its various manifestations. Before bemoaning the world around you, you need to stare deeply into the unwashed cup, taking in its stench that infects whatever you or someone else needs to drink from it. You need to reach the point where you can judge the world only because you have judged yourself first, and have a humble awareness of how God would judge you if all things were fair. But all things are not fair: Jesus took our guilt and punishment upon Himself and credited us with righteousness and forgiveness. Not only does He wash feet, He takes the cup out of our hand (once we desire for it to be clean on the inside), and washes it *on our behalf*, before handing it back to us, and telling us, "go serve others with this cup".

- 1. Sadly, when this verse is quoted, it often betrays people's short attention spans and lack of reflection on Bible passages. This passage continues unto verse 5 and holds other truths:
    - Verse 1 does not absolve the tolerant from all judgement: all people will be judged on the final day (Romans 14:10–12). Judgement is coming anyway.
    - Verse 2 says that those who judge others (from a self-righteous position; see the rest of the passage) will be judged for their judging. Judging does not necessarily mean condemnation, however (although it usually does).
    - Verses 3 and 4 reveal the real problem: it is not simply the act of judging others, it is when one judges others from position where *self-examination* has not yet taken place.
    - Verse 5 clearly states that, once one has undergone self-examination and self-judgement (which will reveal the need for a Saviour and lead to a return to God), one will be in a position to judge others, but not to *condemn* them, but to *help* them, because they are also impeded (they factually have a "speck" in their eye).

Christians have a mandate to bring the gospel to other people (Matthew 28:18–20). At a fundamental level, this cannot happen without some form of judging that some individual or group needs the gospel. The Matthew 7 passage is not a blanket prohibition on all forms of judgement, but should be understood in the way just explained.

- 2. Pride is one of the Seven Deadly Sins. The Seven Deadly Sins is not a biblical concept, but was formulated by early Christians as essentially a teaching tool. While pride stands amongst the others (wrath, greed, sloth, lust, envy and gluttony), I am going to contend that they are not ontologically equal, but that the others derive from it.
- 3. See the Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy [6] article on positive and negative liberty [7].
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