

The Mother of All Vices, Part One (Pride and Arrogance)

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Some people believe that pride lies only in condescension toward others, in vanity and self-aggrandizement. In fact, these are merely superficial aspects of pride, which Christian spiritual literature considers the mother of all evils and vices.

The main pitfall of pride is that it blindfolds the individual from viewing reality, so the person no longer sees anyone but himself or herself, blinded by self-aggrandizement, excess and overconfidence.

This leads individuals to validate everything for themselves, justify every personal action, consider themselves perfect and find no need for others. On the other hand, they would see nothing in others besides their faults and shortcomings, and would oppose them whenever they become prominent or their opinions become popular.

An arrogant person is a rotten pomegranate on the inside even if it looks good on the outside.

Jealousy unnerves arrogant people because they do not want anyone to possess better qualities. Their envy may lead them to harm those who provoke their jealousy; it may even lead to murder. There are many reasons that lead humans to backbite, slander and distort people's reputations, yet what many of us may not realize is that concealed pride is what triggers all these vices.

Pride, according to the teaching of Saint John of the Ladder, generates anger, reproach, rudeness, rage, shouting, blasphemy, hypocrisy, hatred, envy, self-will, resistance and rebellion.

Our contemporary Saint Sophrony Zakharov (+1993) enumerates the combined aspects of pride in detail and in psychological terms. He says: "Pride is the root of sin. All the manifestations through which evil can appear collectively exist in pride: pretense, vainglory, love of power, carelessness, cruelty, indifference to the suffering of one's neighbor, daydreaming, wild imagination, the demonic expression of the eye, the demonic character of every appearance, anxiety, despair, hatred, contempt, envy, and the inferiority complex. For many, the latter is the gateway to physical lust, tormenting inner turmoil, stubbornness, fear of death – or on the

contrary, the longing to end life by suicide – and finally complete derangement of the mind, which is not uncommon... These are the signs of demonic spirituality. However, many people do not realize these detrimental processes of pride because they act discreetly and pass silently. That's when the enemy attacks to destroy the soul.”

The Church Fathers attribute pride to man's fall from paradise. Adam and Eve's pride led them to try reaching for divinity by using the image of God – in which He created them – to achieve His likeness. However, they tried to achieve this without God, but rather, with the help of Satan. This remains man's main sin even today. People do not want God by their side because God's presence requires them to become humble. People reject this at its core, because they understand their existence through self-affirmation only.

In fact, humans have a strong inclination towards excessive self-satisfaction and self-confidence. This is what we call in our spiritual literature the disease of arrogance, which is the root of pride. It is what Saint John of the Ladder calls “the precursor of pride.”

By arrogance, we do not only mean admiring and worshiping oneself, but also seeking praise from others. An arrogant person strives to be viewed perfectly by others – regardless of the reality of the inner self – and aspires to display virtues, talents, and abilities. And all that, not to serve others but rather to gain their appreciation, praise and elevated status in their eyes.