

## LOVE VERSUS PRIDE

### Proverbs 16:16-20

- <sup>16</sup> How much better to get wisdom than gold,  
to get insight rather than silver!
- <sup>17</sup> The highway of the upright avoids evil;  
those who guard their ways preserve their lives.
- <sup>18</sup> Pride goes before destruction,  
a haughty spirit before a fall.
- <sup>19</sup> Better to be lowly in spirit along with the oppressed  
than to share plunder with the proud.
- <sup>20</sup> Whoever gives heed to instruction prospers,  
and blessed is the one who trusts in the LORD.

### John 15:9-17

<sup>9</sup> “As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. <sup>10</sup> If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. <sup>11</sup> I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. <sup>12</sup> My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. <sup>13</sup> Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. <sup>14</sup> You are my friends if you do what I command. <sup>15</sup> I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. <sup>16</sup> You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. <sup>17</sup> This is my command: Love each other.

### MESSAGE:

In his novel *The Great Divorce*, C. S. Lewis pictures hell as a place where everyone is completely alone. There is no “society” as we know it, no one has a relationship with anyone else. Instead of talking with each other, people talk to themselves. Napoleon is pictured as pacing back and forth in a room mumbling to himself, “*If only I had done this, if only I had done that...*” Hell is solitary confinement without the stone walls where people live only in and for themselves.

This is not how we were created to live. We were designed to live in relationships with God and with each other and without those relationships we cannot possibly be happy. Immediately after God created Adam he said, “*It is not good for the man to be alone,*” and he created a helpmate for him. (*Genesis 2:18*) From beginning to end the Bible is a book about relationships. Violating relationships is called “sin”; honoring relationships is called

“love.” Love nourishes relationships; sin destroys them. Love puts the other person first; sin puts the other person last. Love builds up the one who loves as well as the beloved; sin tears them both down. Love comes from God; sin comes from pride.

A recent book by Edward Sri entitled *Who Am I To Judge?* deals with a contemporary school of thought called “moral relativism” or “situational ethics.” Its adherents deny that there is any such thing as absolute right and wrong—that right and wrong are relative concepts that can only be defined in terms of specific situations. What is “right” in one case may be “wrong” in another. They argue that if people would only accept this, they would be more tolerant and non-judgmental toward each other. Their credo is something like: *“I should be able to do whatever I want as long as it doesn’t hurt anyone else. You do your thing and I’ll do mine and everyone will be happy.”*

Despite its claims, far from improving relations between people, moral relativism destroys relationships by removing the common bond of morality that makes civilization possible. Consider the person who uses recreational drugs. He thinks that what he does in his own home is his business and doesn’t hurt anyone else. Others like him do the same thing and all of a sudden we have an opioid epidemic. Doctors begin to be monitored to ensure that they are not writing too many prescriptions for pain-killing drugs. They respond by cutting back on prescribing them—or even by refusing to prescribe them at all. Then, a person who has a legitimate—perhaps even a desperate need—to control chronic pain, can no longer get pain killing drugs.

Or consider the man or woman who has abandoned the moral standard limiting sex to marriage and goes about having consensual sex with whomever he or she pleases. Surely this doesn’t hurt anyone: just two consenting adults having a good time. Sixty years ago this person was the exception, not the rule; now they’re the rule and not the exception. And what has been the fruit of this “liberating” practice? A divorce rate of over 50%, fatherless homes, welfare-dependent mothers and abortions on demand. None of us lives exclusively to ourselves: the choices we make always have implications for other people.

God gave us moral laws not to keep us from where the fun is, but to protect us from the consequences of sin. When we declare His moral law to be irrelevant or outdated and substitute our own morality—or immorality—we invite the consequences of sin not only into our own lives, but into the lives of others as well. As Paul writes in the *1<sup>st</sup> Chapter of Romans*, when we reject God’s moral authority and set about charting our own course, we are turning ourselves over to our sinful natures and begin to live like animals rather than image-bearers of God.

The basic sin from which all other sins sprout—is pride. As C. S. Lewis puts it, sins like lust, covetousness, envy and greed are mere flea-bites when compared with pride. Pride comes directly from hell: it made the devil what he is and it led Adam and Eve to invite sin and evil into the world. Pride is the mortal enemy of love and its perfect opposite.

Love builds up our neighbor; pride diminishes him.

Love serves others; pride serves one’s self.

Love lifts us up; pride goes before the fall.

Love builds up; pride puffs up.

Love connects us to God and to each other; pride isolates us from God and from each other.

Jesus commanded us to love each other as he loved us. So how can we go about loving each other in a society that values Facebook more than Christ? I can think of three ways.

First—by witnessing to Christ in our words and actions by ***always responding to others with love***. Pope Francis has said that his favorite image for the church is that of a field hospital—a M.A.S.H. unit. Sri writes: *“Like the medical care offered to the seriously wounded on the battlefield, the church needs to go out to the many people who have been wounded by the secular, relativistic culture in which we live.”* (Sri, p. 85). Many—if not most—people are walking wounded. They need mercy; they need love. They either don’t know or don’t believe that God loves them and they won’t be persuaded by logic or Bible-beating. St. Bernard of Clairvaux wrote that most people, *“...imagine this kindly disposed God to be harsh and severe, this merciful God to be callous and inflexible, this lovable God to be cruel and oppressive.”* (Sri, p. 91) And they won’t be persuaded by theological arguments, they will only be persuaded by love. And the only way they can come to know God’s love is by experiencing the love of God’s people.

Is The lesson for us? Always respond with love. No matter what—always respond with love. Pray without ceasing for your heart to be filled with God’s love, so that In Paul’s words you can, *“Rejoice in the Lord always! I will say it again, Rejoice! Let your forbearing spirit be evident to all: the Lord is near.”* (Philippians 4:4) Respond always with love and you will provide a powerful witness to God’s love.

Second, in the face of worldly cynicism and despair, ***insist that life is precious and has meaning***. This includes the life of each individual as well as the life of collective humanity. At its core, moral relativism is merely a contemporary form of an ancient Greek philosophy called “hedonism,” which taught that the goal of life was simply to maximize pleasure and minimize pain and that no other moral law governed human behavior. Like hedonism, moral relativism denies moral responsibility to God or other people and ends up producing a society of unconnected narcissists who attend to their own desires and pleasures. People burrow into themselves and relationships get short shrift—if any shrift at all. We end up with a social media culture where communication with others consists mainly of self-advertising.

In contrast to this, we can insist that life does have meaning and value beyond our mere appetites, and that this meaning and value can be found in relationships—with God and with each other. That instead of enslaving ourselves to ourselves, we can learn to love our God with all our heart and soul and mind and strength, and love our neighbor as ourselves.

Finally, ***we can listen***. People need to be heard; they yearn to be listened to—and we don’t do a very good job of listening. When I first became a pastor, one of my big worries was that when members of my church came to see me with a problem, I wouldn’t be able to come up with a solution. What I quickly found out was that when someone came to see me about a problem they had, they weren’t really looking for me to solve it as much as they just wanted to talk about it with someone who would actually listen to them. Over time I began to realize

that there are a lot of people in the world who don't feel like they have anyone to talk to who will really listen to them.

Someone once said: *"Don't ever tell your problems to anyone because half of them don't care and the rest are glad you have them."* It may sound funny but it hits at an awful truth about relationships in a fallen world. It also shows us, however, what an enormous opportunity we have to give other people something they really, really need: a tender ear, a listening heart. No one says it's easy: listening—really listening—is hard work. But like any other form of love—it builds up the listener as it builds up the one to whom he listens.

These are three things we can do to glorify God and draw people into His kingdom. We can respond lovingly to others. We can insist that life is precious and has meaning. And we can listen.

Pride turns us in on ourselves and enslaves us to our sins. Love bursts the bonds of pride and sets us free.

Amen.

### **1 Corinthians 1:18-31 Christ Crucified Is God's Power and Wisdom**

<sup>18</sup> For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God. <sup>19</sup> For it is written:

"I will destroy the wisdom of the wise;  
the intelligence of the intelligent I will frustrate."

<sup>20</sup> Where is the wise person? Where is the teacher of the law? Where is the philosopher of this age? Has not God made foolish the wisdom of the world? <sup>21</sup> For since in the wisdom of God the world through its wisdom did not know him, God was pleased through the foolishness of what was preached to save those who believe.

<sup>22</sup> Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, <sup>23</sup> but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles, <sup>24</sup> but to those whom God has called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God. <sup>25</sup> For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.

<sup>26</sup> Brothers and sisters, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. <sup>27</sup> But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. <sup>28</sup> God chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, <sup>29</sup> so that no one may boast before him. <sup>30</sup> It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. <sup>31</sup> Therefore, as it is written: "Let the one who boasts boast in the Lord."