

PRIDE!

Last Sunday, several religious leaders in the New York City area addressed a group of black gays and lesbians that were attending a meeting aimed at opposing the resurgence in anti-gay rhetoric coming from many black churches. Those attending were urged not to embrace the idea put forward by some ministers that gay and lesbian folk are less favored by God. James Forbes, senior minister at the Riverside Church in New York, said it this way, *“Your job is to get up every day and be grateful to God for your DNA. It took an artist divine to make this design!”*

In many religious circles it is taught that if you think too highly of yourself, if you are full of pride, you will be led away from reliance upon God and also less concerned with the welfare of others. In fact pride is listed as one of the seven deadly sins along with envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed and sloth. Pride in this context can be associated with arrogance, conceit and smugness.

So why, if pride is such an unhealthy thing, has the GLBT community embraced it? Because there is a healthy way of understanding pride; with terms like value, self-worth and self-esteem. However, to no one’s surprise, there are those who preach and teach that any thought or concept of human goodness, value, and worth is sinful.

This understanding is clearly noted in John Newton’s well sung words, *“Amazing grace! How sweet the sound—that saved a **wretch** like me!”* Friends, there is a reason, not a theological one but a convenient one, that some religious groups have for teaching their adherents to understand themselves as wretches—to see themselves as lacking inherent value and worth. When an individual lacks a sense of personal value and worth they are more likely to embrace guilt and shame. Friends, it is easier to control and to manipulate, the thoughts, feelings and actions of people that do not feel good about themselves than it is to control those people who have a healthy sense of self. And believe it or not, many religious groups like to control and manipulate their followers. Many religious groups depend upon the power of guilt and shame for their very existence.

On the contrary, I believe that God desires for all people to have a healthy sense of self; a positive self-esteem and self-worth. I have personally discovered that the better I feel about myself the better I feel about my relationship with God and with others. GLBT Pride is not about an arrogance that leads us away from reliance upon God; but rather, GLBT Pride is about embracing oneself as created by God. GLBT Pride is not about conceit and smugness in relation to others; but rather, GLBT Pride is about embracing oneself and others as persons of value and worth.

The main reason so many GLBT folk enter reparative therapies or ex-gay movements or choose to live in the closet is because they feel guilt and shame about their sexual orientation—a feeling that is engrained and reinforced by religion—manipulation at its best! Friends, hear me now! Pride, embracing oneself as a person of value, worth and dignity means the day of guilt is past! Pride means the day of reparative therapy is past! Pride means the day of living in the closet is past! Pride means the day of shame is past! GLBT Pride means, *“Your job is to get up every day and be grateful to God for your DNA. It took an artist divine to make this design!”*

