

## Seven Deadly Sins

The rights and wrongs of Moral behaviour have always been a subject of strong debate. On the website I have already written on the moral challenges facing society. This essay looks at the subject of sin as reflected in the Seven Deadly Sins. Sin is the religious word used for actions which are regarded as wrong or cause harm to others. It is people behaving badly.

When we start to try to define what is morally wrong we run into difficulty. When we think in religious terms of sin or sinfulness, the Seven Deadly Sins, are regarded as the worst and the source of all other sins. To help us understand why this is the case we need to look at these and the impact they have on people.

The Seven Deadly Sins are: Pride, Greed (Avarice, old versions use covetousness), Lust, Envy, Gluttony, Anger, and Sloth. Pride is seen as the beginning of all sins and covetousness is the root of all evils. Most people would acknowledge that there are different kinds of sins, but trying to define their cause and effect is difficult. I am therefore going to examine them individually.

In the Christian moral tradition not all pride is sinful and in some cases is regarded as commendable. For example: pride in one's job, self-respect, commendable self-values or loving others above self.

Pride arises when a person's attention is fixed on them self as the doer of good or as the possessor of an admirable quality, they have a very high opinion of them self, rather than upon the worth of their acts or its quality. People who are controlled pride or ego take the view that my work is good therefore I am good. They give self-congratulation when their work is not good or satisfaction over qualities they do not possess. People also exhibit conceit and always wondering what others are thinking of what they do.

Paul warns against self-congratulation and insists that all that people possess they owe to Christ (1Cor. 4.6; 2 Cor. 12.9; Phil 3.9)

The object of pride is self and is the root of arrogance, anger, despising others, taking pleasure in other humiliation to show their superiority. It is being boastful of what you can do, and what you have achieved, people who have made large sums of money can treat others less fortunate than themselves with arrogance and contempt. Pride also corrupts the virtues; even its apparent opposite, humility can conceal it but it can also be seen when people show pride of power, of knowledge and of righteousness. The spiritual writers define it as concupiscence of the mind.

Greed also known as avarice: is a form of covetousness, for example; a desire to get and keep money and possessions. Persistent greed kills generosity and breeds anxieties. Their anxieties are about the safety of what they hoard and the possible danger of losing it. It gives a sense of power and pride in achievement. Like the rich man in the parable who hoarded a load of grain but died before he could enjoy his wealth. (Luke 12.15-20).

In modern times the greedy person is found looking at their bank balance rather than looking at their actual money. In modern society people show greed in small ways putting off paying bills. It can also be seen in hoarding of possession or buying and consuming large quantities of food. There is a greed that is spiritual rather than material. It can be partly described as eagerness to possess knowledge, love, joy, peace, faith and hope, more than others. The eagerness to possess spiritual things and banishes them beyond other human's reach.

The website has a number of articles on the negative impact of greed.

The various banking scandals and financial frauds in recent times in which greedy bankers, lawyers and accountants, plus unscrupulous criminals have sought easy riches, fraudulently deprived thousands of people of their saving causing immeasurable suffering. This greed inflicted

catastrophe on many innocent victims and its adverse social consequences will be felt for many years. Worshipping money, is placing our hopes and trust in it a form of idolatry, blinding us to the social and personal costs of greed. The assumption that greed is good and that riches guarantee satisfying lives is false. Greed manifests itself in many ways. The cutthroat competitor, the workaholic, the swindler, and the gambler are all greedy. Sometimes even the spend thrift is guilty of greed.

Prophets Elijah, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos and Micah were passionate critics of greed and the injustices to which it led. They had the courage and conviction to confront kings and priest when they abused their power and stole from the weak. In today's world few people are willing to condemn the greedy and the wealthy who hoard their wealth while others suffer as a result of their actions. May be the reason why people are reluctant to criticise the greedy is that they are envious of the wealth?

Lust can be seen in the act of adultery, the lust and desire of another person's partner or in paedophilia. Adultery is more serious than theft for it says in Proverbs. 6.30-2 Do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his appetite when he steals. The person who commits adultery has no sense, they who do it destroys themselves. Wound and dishonour will they get and their disgrace will not be wiped away. Adultery causes deep hurt and suffering to those who relationships have broken up through adultery. Lust drives a desire and those who have this cannot control these lusts full desires having no thought or considerate to the feeling of those who are hurt. Adultery is not only a sin of lust but also a sin of injustice and can be considered as a kind of greed.

Lust can also be seen in child abuse, paedophilia, and the actions of sexual predators, and pornography. There have many cases reported in the media of paedophiles abusing children, this damages the child for life, but the examples that have to be of concern to Christians are those carried out by Priests and the failure of the Church to take action to stop it. Lust is an uncontrolled sexual passion seen and understood only in terms of its physical expression. While the fact remains that sex in human beings can never be understood and expressed except in both physical and spiritual terms. Men and women frequently use the physical act of sex as a drug that soothes or as a sensation which stimulates. Many look to sexual experiences as a distraction from the stresses of so much of modern city life. The growth in prostitution and pornography illustrate how greedy and dishonest people such as traffickers exploit the lust and desire of individuals to make large sums of money.

Envy, it is said in the Gospels that Pilate knew the chief priests had delivered Jesus up for trail out of envy. (Matt. 27.18; Mark 15.10) They had many reason for their envy, particularly on account of his authority and his refusal to dictate or be dictated to; Like all envious men the chief priest set out to destroy what they could not possess. People are as envious of spiritual qualities such as wisdom, truthfulness, courage or sanctity as of riches, power and the prestige of high office. They would find less reason to envy Pilate than to envy his prisoner.

Envy of material things is much easier to detect in oneself than envy in others' spiritual qualities such as faithfulness or devoutness. Parents can often without knowing it produce conditions which help to make children envy one another, for example; by stressing the cleverness of another child. People can encourage envy without knowing what they are doing. Envy can lead to hatred and hatred together with envy gives birth to malice. Pride can give rise to envy – the proud person wants to be rich and adorned with all qualities and honours; when they fail to achieve this their envy kindles anger.

There is no single virtue which can be pitted against envy rather it is the whole quality of devout living which enable a person to rejoice in the good fortune sanctity and abilities of others instead of being envious.

Gluttony: No one can say that a hungry person's desire to eat is sinful. The glutton's desire for more food than they need is sinful; their heavy dull state after a meal is more than a symbol of gluttony. To dull oneself by over eating brings about a temporary inability to live fully in mind, words and actions; it cuts a person off from their fellow because they cannot pay sufficient attention to them; it deadens their general awareness of what is happening with in their immediate relationships. Persistent gluttony makes concentration thinking prayer almost impossible.

Gluttony is not to be described as merely an individual's failure to control a fleshly appetite. The gluttonous person knowingly or unknowingly uses food as others use drugs to give them pleasure sensations which can help them for the time to ignore the parts of their life which are boring, disturbing or terrifying. Gluttony like all sins of the flesh, must be considered spiritually. That is while over-eating is a defect the spiritual condition which permits it is very much more serious as it reveals the glutton's urgent need to escape reality.

Anger: It is impossible to imagine a person incapable of anger and terrifying to picture one whose anger is ungovernable. A person's neural system and the sharpness of their five sense have a good deal to do with their proneness to anger. A person of deep love and loyalties is more likely to be angry than one who cares little for any person or institution.

Anger upsets a person's mental and spiritual organisation. The more delicate the organisation is the more damage anger can do. Anger distorts a person's perspective so that they see life out of proportion and does what they do not want to do and therefore for the time they are the sort of person they do not want to be. Habitual anger can keep a person in such a state that they continually contradict themselves in what they say and in what they do.

The sources of anger are complex, among them are; greed, whether for food, amusement, importance, security or sanctity, pride, especially when it is on its guard against suspected attack or is asserting independence, fear of losing freedom security, power, importance etc. While anger cannot be banished or cured by acts of will, it can be indirectly controlled by the maintains of a right disposition towards God, the world, others and self. Christianity does not say that Christians are never to be angry. It would be subhuman for anyone not to be moved to anger by cruelty, deceit, treachery or readiness to defraud or destroy the weak. A Christian is expected to control or rather to attempt to control the expression of anger. The image of Jesus advancing on the tables of the money changes and traders with a scourge in his hand is not a picture of the suppression of anger but of its control.

Sloth: in modern speech is laziness, it is the constant desire for bodily rest and sleep. The lazy person avoids all physical exertion as far as they can. Their state is that of one who disbelieves in both God and the significance of human activity. Mental sloth in a Christian is seen in a desire to find a way to get necessary understanding of all things without effort or to discover a code, a set of doctrines or some simple formula which can be directly and literally used in every circumstances of life. For example, a Scholar reluctance to check reference and an unwillingness to write and rewrite their work or a person who serves food failing to use basic hygiene so therefore containments food people have to eat.

All sins are against God and all are harmful to others. We need to understand how sin affects our lives and to avoid sins temptations. The cure is twofold; reform of our judgement by knowing oneself and the means knowing oneself as God knows you. In the modern society this can be difficult but we need to be aware of our own action and also highlight the harm done to others by sinful acts. All of us need to regularly reflect on our actions and try to always avoid succumbing to sin and temptation.

End.