

Introduction to Seven Sins

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What are the seven sins?

Pride/Vainglory (*superbia*)

Envy (*invidia*)

Sloth (*acedia*)

Greed (*avarice*)

Anger/Wrath (*ira*)

Lust (*luxuria*)

Gluttony (*gula*)

Where did they come from?

You won't find the seven sins in a neat list in the Bible. There are many lists of sins. But these specific seven came out of monks living in the desert in the 3rd and 4th centuries. As the monks attempted to live a life of purity, their spiritual advisors discerned certain vices that were the root of all other sins. Two monks, Evagrius of Pontus (234-399) and John Cassian (360-435), both recorded lists of eight vices. Eventually these were fine-tuned until Pope Gregory the Great structured them into a list of seven. Originally they were called the *capital vices* which helps us to better understand them. They are not just sins but *vices*. That is, they are deeply rooted patterns in our character. They are habituated over time. And they are *capital*, meaning they are the source and root whence all other sins flows.

Why are they sometimes called the *deadly* sins?

The word deadly was added later when the Roman Catholic church classified certain sins as either mortal or venial. Mortal sins were deadly because they rejected God's love and brought damnation. Although they aren't always deadly (which is why I'm not using that word in our series), left unchecked these seven vices will most certainly destroy faith and bring spiritual death.

They don't seem so bad. Why aren't worse sins on the list like drunkenness or murder or cheating?

This is probably the reason that most modern people laugh at the list or use them sarcastically. After all, our culture would much sooner list something like political tyranny or racial violence. Yet what makes these seven so important is their capacity to generate all other sins. They are the roots, the spring. For instance, from envy can spring sins such as hatred, violence, murder, gossip, rejoicing at another's failures.

Why should I care about the seven sins?

I would propose at least two reasons. First, it helps us to confess. "When we study the vices, we can better articulate for ourselves what parts of our sinful nature we are grappling with and trying to put to death, and learn how one vice might variously reveal itself in feelings and actions...In this way, our confession can be fine-tuned. Rather than praying in general for forgiveness of sin, or reducing all our sin to pride or generic selfishness, we can lay specific sins before God, ask for the grace to root them out, and engage in daily disciplines...." (DeYoung, Rebecca Konyndyk. *Glittering Vices: A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins and Their Remedies*. Brazos Press, 2009, p. 21).

Secondly, we see where we're missing out! All of the vices attempt to substitute a cheap imitation of the real good that God wants us to have. Lust pretends to bring real pleasure. But it doesn't. God does. Greed fakes security. But it doesn't give it. Only God does. This is why the vices are so attractive to us. They promise us true good and happiness. But they are cheap imitations that hurt us. The true goods are all found in Christ.

A Study of Greed (Avarice)

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I want it all, I want it all, I want it all, and I want it now. - Queen

What is Greed?

Greed is second only to pride as the most destructive. Jesus speaks against greed more than any other sin. The classic definition of greed is an excessive impulse to hoard money or the goods money buys.

What are the two parts of greed?

Acquisition and Possession. Acquisition is greed to get what we don't have. We want to acquire goods. Possession is greed to keep what we already have. "It's mine!"

Why is greed so dangerous?

Greed replaces God with money and goods. We look to money to provide all that we need instead of God. And we look to money for our future security (instead of trusting God). In short, greed kills faith.

Some Hard-Hitting Questions to Consider:

James 4:1-2 "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder. You covet and cannot obtain, so you fight and quarrel. You do not have, because you do not ask."

What if someone didn't know you but could see all your spending for an entire month? What conclusions would they draw about your beliefs and priorities?

Do you feel better when you purchase?

Does money make you feel more powerful?

How many hours a week do you spend shopping, browsing, and purchasing?

Do you give a thought that your inexpensive clothing is being produced by a worker in a far-off country barely scraping out a living wage?

When you invest, do you ever consider what goods you're investing in or only the projected return?

Do you regularly try to get something for nothing (through investments, credit cards, rewards programs, etc.)?

(Questions paraphrased from Sayers, Dorothy. "The Other Six Deadly Sins". 1942; DeYoung, *Glittering Vices*, p. 106; Cunningham, Lawrence S. *The Seven Deadly Sins*. Ave Maria Press, 2012, p. 40)

What are the opposite virtues of greed?

Contentment and Generosity (liberality).

Where does greed lead us?

Greed leaves us lonely. To acquire all for ourselves, we must necessarily take from others. It also attacks love of our neighbor. When we hoard money and goods, we deprive our neighbor who needs those goods.

The other problem with greed is that it is self-defeating. It will never bring true joy. The more we acquire and possess, the more we want, the more insecure we become, and the more we worry. Happiness doesn't come from possessing things less than ourselves. It comes from being possessed by One greater than ourselves. (Kreeft, Peter. *Back to Virtue: Traditional Moral Wisdom for Modern Moral Confusion*. Ignatius Press, 1992, p. 112).

Why is greed especially dangerous in America today?

First is society's insistence that you must always be climbing. Second is the bombardment of advertising which teaches us "what we should want". Third is the reality that our current economy is founded upon mass consumerism. Fourth is that our economy is money instead of natural wealth (land, houses, etc.) and there isn't any natural limit to how much money you may attain. (Kreeft, *Back to Virtue*, p. 111)

What is the answer to greed?

Jesus is the answer. Instead of finding security and sufficiency in money and goods, Jesus is our security and sufficiency. The antidote, then, to greed is generosity. The best treatment is to give and give often.

Consider the following verses:

Luke 12:32-34 "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give to the needy. Provide yourselves with moneybags that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."

Hebrews 13:5-6 "Keep your life free from love of money, and be content with what you have, for he has said, "I will never leave you nor forsake you." So we can confidently say, 'The Lord is my helper; I will not fear; what can man do to me?'"

For three particular stories of greed, please read:

Abram and Lot – Genesis 13

The Parable of the Rich Fool – Luke 12:13-21

Judas – Matthew 26:14-15