

SEVEN Deadly Sins - #1 Pride

How many of you have heard of the "Seven Deadly Sins"? Now here's the interesting thing. There is no actual list in the Bible called "The Seven Deadly Sins" The list we know was developed by Pope Gregory 1, who was Pope from 590-604. He observed that there were seven sins that Christians seemed to struggle with the most, and that all other sins can be traced to these seven. Here's Pope Gregory's list of the seven deadly sins, a list that has basically been unchallenged for 1500 years:

LUST: GLUTTONY: GREED: SLOTH (or LAZINESS): ANGER: ENVY: & PRIDE.

OK. I want to switch gears for a moment. How many of you remember the T.V. comedy Gilligan's Island? It aired from 1964-1967. Sherwood Swartz, who produced the show, once admitted that he modelled all the characters on the seven deadly sins.

Guess which character represented PRIDE? That was the PROFESSOR who thought he knew everything. How about LUST? That was GINGER, the beautiful movie star. ENVY was represented by MARYANN, who was always jealous of GINGER'S looks and fame. The millionaire THURSTON HOWELL III, represented GREED. LUVVIE aka MRS HOWELL – represented GLUTTONY, because she always wanted more. The CAPTAIN stood for ANGER. Remember how he was always throwing stuff at Gilligan or hitting him with his hat? And SLOTH (OR LAZINESS), well that was GILLIGAN wasn't it? He could never be found when there was work to be done.

Now here is another interesting twist. Some folk have suggested that GILLIGAN also represented the DEVIL, the one who puts sin before us. After all, GILLIGAN dressed in red, a colour associated with the Devil, and he was always seemed to sabotage every plan that might save the castaways and get them home.

OK. Let's get back to the seven deadly sins. Here's the thing we need to remember. Romans 3:23 says: **"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."** And Romans 6:23 says, **"For the wages of sin is death."** So the word "deadly" as in *"The Seven Deadly Sins"* is misleading because clearly every sin is deadly.

But I think it is still true that if we can get a good handle on confronting these seven particular sins in our lives, it will help us deal with the other sin issues in our life as well. So today let's talk about the sin of PRIDE. Pride really is the original sin, the most serious of the seven.

So what is PRIDE? It's when you think everything is about you. When you think everything in life revolves around you, and your wants, and your needs. To use the story of Adam and Eve in the Book of Genesis, it's when you believe Satan's lie that you can be like God, that you can be god of your own life.

Think about it. When you boil it all down, your life can only really revolve around three things. It can revolve around God. Or it can revolve around yourself. Or it can revolve around other people.

My observation is that a lot of the problems we face in life come because we don't follow Jesus instruction in Matthew 6:33, **"Seek the Kingdom of God above all else, and live righteously, and he will give you everything you need."** Our human problem is, that to do that, we need to surrender ourselves, our wants, our desires, our opinions - our whole selves- to God. But our pride gets in the way.

Or sometimes we let our lives revolve around other people. Peer pressure is a very real thing. Adults are just as moulded by it as teenagers. But life quickly teaches us that people can't always be relied on. They can hurt us, wound us, reject us, and disappoint us. Now that's not really surprising given Romans 3:23, **"For everyone has sinned; we all fall short of God's glorious standard."**

So in response to human failing, we become self-centered. We think that only we know best. We stop listening to others. We reject their advice or their guidance or their correction. We forget that the poet John Donne once said, **"That no-one is an island"**. Our mantra is "me first". Our personal anthem becomes "It's all about me." And that brings us full circle to why Pope Gregory listed PRIDE as the first deadly sin, as the original sin.

Let me take you to a passage in the Old Testament Book of Isaiah. Isaiah, building on the early chapters of Genesis, describes the pride of one angel. We call this angel Lucifer, or Satan. Lucifer, the Bible tells us, believed he could do as good a job as God and so he started to desire God's position. In his pride he rebelled against God. Isaiah 14: 12-15 (NLT):

- 12 "How you are fallen from heaven,
O shining star, son of the morning!
You have been thrown down to the earth,
you who destroyed the nations of the world.**
- 13 For you said to yourself,
'I will ascend to heaven and set my throne above God's stars.
I will preside on the mountain of the gods
far away in the north.**
- 14 I will climb to the highest heavens
and be like the Most High.'**
- 15 Instead, you will be brought down to the place of the dead,
down to its lowest depths.**

Follow this story of pride through the books of Ezekiel and Revelation. You will discover that Lucifer persuades one third of the angels to join him in his rebellion against God. As a result God casts them out of heaven, just like Adam and Eve were cast out of the Paradise, because of their pride in wanting to be like God. We call these fallen angels demons, evil spirits or dark angels. This explains why the apostle Paul wrote in Ephesians 6:12, ***"For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."***

Author Ken Blanchard once defined EGO as "***EDGING GOD OUT***". That's a really good description of PRIDE. We read a Scripture about that this morning. It's the story about a Pharisee, a religious leader, and about a social outcast, a tax collector. The parable begins in Luke 19:9. ***"Then Jesus told this story to some who had great confidence in their own righteousness and scorned everyone else."***

That's pride, isn't it? To be confident in your own moral performance and to scorn or judge everyone else. When you think you have it all together, when you believe that you are better than everyone else, when you assume that you are always right, then it is easy to become so proud and arrogant that you write others off as not that important – including them being not that important to God.

So Jesus says two people went to the Temple to pray. The really religious guy who was proud of his faith, his religious practices, and his goodness, stood before God – which was the normal Jewish prayer posture. And he prayed, ***"I thank you, God, that I am not like other people—cheaters,***

sinners, adulterers. I'm certainly not like that tax collector! I fast twice a week, and I give you a tenth of my income."

This guy was so full of himself that he didn't get it. God wanted him to be humble in his sight, because God can do incredible things through humble people who are open to his guidance and leadership in their lives, like Mother Teresa. He can't do as much with people who think they know it all. Or who act superior. Or who demand their rights. Or who look down on other people because of their position in society, or their colour, or their economic status.

"But the tax collector stood at a distance and dared not even lift his eyes to heaven as he prayed. Instead, he beat his chest in sorrow, saying, 'O God, be merciful to me, for I am a sinner.' In effect he says. *'God. I am messed up. Really messed up. I don't even know if there is any hope for me. But if there is, I need your help.'* Folk, God can use people like that. People who really recognize their need of him. People who are willing to humble themselves before him and who are open to being filled by the Holy Spirit.

Now one more general fact about "The seven deadly sins". When Pope Gregory developed the list, he placed alongside it a list of "Seven Holy Virtues". So guess which positive quality counterbalanced the sin of PRIDE. It was- HUMILITY. Here's how the story of the Pharisee and tax collector ends. ***"I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."***

There is a saying that we all know well. ***"Pride comes before a fall'.*** That's actually found in the Bible, in Proverbs 16:18. In The Message translation it reads, ***"First pride, then the crash – the bigger the ego, the harder the fall"***.

OK. We all have some work to do this week. I'm challenging all of us, myself included, to spend time this week examining our lives to identify where pride is a real issue for us. Then we need to deal with those issues and work on replacing our pride with humility. Let the story of the Pharisee and the tax collector be our guide.

PASTORAL PRAYER

Almighty God,

We confess our pride to you. It is an ugly thing. Forgive us. Teach us how to be humble before you, and to seek your face. Keep the example of Jesus your Son before us, who despite being equal with you, humbled himself, and became one of us, to show us what obedience and sacrifice for others really looks like.

Continue to bless and protect our Mission Team as they labor for your Kingdom in Ghana. May they serve always with a spirit of humility.

Today we pray you, to grant comfort to the mourning, strength to the dying, wisdom to the confused, justice to the oppressed, guidance to those who govern us, and peace to those burdened by guilt.

We pray all these things in Jesus Name. Amen.