

Seven Deadly Sins

No doubt you have heard the expression, “the Seven Deadly Sins.”

This suggests, it occurs to me, that sins can be ranked in some order, i.e., that some sins are worse than other sins. That is, some sins are “deadly” and other sins are not.

From a human viewpoint sexually molesting a child is certainly worse than stealing watermelon from a neighbor’s garden.

But from the viewpoint of God, sin is simply sin.

On the surface, what was so terrible about Adam’s eating of the forbidden fruit? That one sin of the one man imputed sin and guilt to the entire human race.

The act of eating the forbidden fruit is not the issue.

The issue is Who was the act against and what was the motive behind the act?

Ultimately, all sin is against God and the motive behind all sin is to be independent from God. Yet, the Bible does classify some sins as being worse than other sins:

Colossians 3:1-11

If then you have been raised with Christ, seek the things that are above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. ² Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth. ³ For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. ⁴ When Christ who is your life appears, then you also will appear with him¹ in glory.

⁵ Put to death therefore what is earthly in you: sexual immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. ⁶ On account of these the wrath of God is coming. ⁷ In these you too once walked, when you were living in them. ⁸ But now you must put them all away: anger, wrath, malice, slander, and obscene talk from your mouth. ⁹ Do not lie to one another, seeing that you have put off the old self with its practices ¹⁰ and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge after the image of its creator. ¹¹ Here there is not Greek and Jew, circumcised and uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave, free; but Christ is all, and in all.
ESV

G. Campbell Morgan made an astute observation about the sins in verse 5 and the sins in verse 8. He said the sins in verse 8 were “sins in good standing.”

The Roman Catholic Church classifies sins into venial and mortal.

“**1852** There are a great many kinds of sins. Scripture provides several lists of them. The *Letter to the Galatians* contrasts the works of the flesh with the fruit of the Spirit. ‘Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, anger, selfishness, dissention, factions, envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.’ Gal 5:19-21

“**1855** *Mortal sin* destroys charity in the heart of man by a grave violation of God’s law; it turns man away from God, who is his ultimate end and his beatitude, by preferring an inferior good to him.

Venial sin allows charity to subsist, even though it offends and wounds it.”

Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1995, pages 506-507

But we need to be very careful about “small sins.” James warns us:

James 2:8-13

⁸ If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, “You shall love your neighbor as yourself,” you are doing well. ⁹ But if you show partiality, you are committing sin and are convicted by the law as transgressors. ¹⁰ For whoever keeps the whole law but fails in one point has become accountable for all of it. ¹¹ For he who said, “Do not commit adultery,” also said, “Do not murder.” If you do not commit adultery but do murder, you have become a transgressor of the law. ¹² So speak and so act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. ¹³ For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.

So what about the “Seven Deadly Sins?”

What are they?

Are the “seven deadly sins” a biblical concept?

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Briefly the “seven deadly sins” are:

Pride is excessive belief in one's own abilities that interferes with the individual's recognition of the grace of God. It has been called the sin from which all others arise. Pride is also known as Vanity.

Envy is the desire for others' traits, status, abilities, or situation.

Gluttony is an inordinate desire to consume more than that which one requires.

Lust is an inordinate craving for the pleasures of the body.

Anger is manifested in the individual who spurns love and opts instead for fury. It is also known as Wrath.

Greed is the desire for material wealth or gain, ignoring the realm of the spiritual. It is also called Avarice or Covetousness.

Sloth is the avoidance of physical or spiritual work.

The Seven Deadly Sins never occur as a formal list in the Bible.

Where did the “seven deadly sins” originate?

According to *Sacred Origins of Profound Things*, by Charles Panati, Greek monastic theologian Evagrius of Pontus first drew up a list of eight offenses and wicked human passions: They were, in order of increasing seriousness: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. Evagrius saw the escalating severity as representing increasing fixation with the self, with pride as the most egregious of the sins. Acedia (from the Greek "akedia," or "not to care") denoted "spiritual sloth." In the late 6th century, Pope Gregory the Great reduced the list to seven items, folding vainglory into pride, acedia into sadness, and adding envy. His ranking of the Sins' seriousness was based on the degree from which they offended against love. It was, from most serious to least: pride, envy, anger, sadness, avarice, gluttony, and lust. Later theologians, including St. Thomas Aquinas, would contradict the notion that the seriousness of the sins could be ranked in this way. The term "covetousness" has historically been used interchangeably with "avarice" in accounts of the Deadly Sins. In the seventeenth century, the Church replaced the vague sin of "sadness" with sloth.

Question: "What are the seven deadly sins?"

Answer: The seven deadly sins are a list originally used in early Christian teachings to educate and instruct followers concerning fallen man's tendency to sin. The misconception about the list of seven "deadly" sins is that they are sins that God will not forgive. The Bible is clear that the only sin God will not forgive is that of continued unbelief, because it rejects the only means to obtain forgiveness—Jesus Christ and His substitutionary death on the cross.

Is the idea of seven deadly sins biblical? Yes and no. Proverbs 6:16-19 declares, "There are six things the LORD hates, seven that are detestable to him: 1) haughty eyes, 2) a lying tongue, 3) hands that shed innocent blood, 4) a heart that devises wicked schemes, 5) feet that are quick to rush into evil, 6) a false witness who pours out lies, and 7) a man who stirs up dissension among brothers." However, this list is not what most people understand as the seven deadly sins.

According to Pope Gregory the Great in the 6th century, the seven deadly sins are as follows: pride, envy, gluttony, lust, anger, greed, and sloth. Although these are undeniably sins, they are never given the description of "the seven deadly sins" in the Bible. The traditional list of seven deadly sins can function as a good way to categorize the many different sins that exist. Nearly every kind of sin could be placed under one of the seven categories. More importantly, we must realize these seven sins are no more "deadly" than any other sin. All sin results in death (Romans 6:23). Praise be to God, that through Jesus Christ, all of our sins, including the "seven deadly sins," can be forgiven (Matthew 26:28; Acts 10:43; Ephesians 1:7).

On March 21st I brought a study on **covetousness** and the Rich Fool and that will serve as the lesson on Greed or Avarice, number six on the list.

Now we will consider the sin of **pride**, number one on the list.

Pride is excessive belief in one's own abilities that interferes with the individual's recognition of the grace of God. It has been called the sin from which all others arise. Pride is also known as Vanity.

Pride is inordinate and unreasonable self-esteem, attended with insolence and rude treatment of others.

Pride. *The Old Testament.* While pride is sometimes used in the Old Testament in a positive sense (i.e., the "pride" of the land of Israel [Ps 47:4; Ezek 24:21]; or, God's "pride/majesty/excellency" [Ex 15:7; Job 37:4; Isa 2:10]), its negative sense predominates, occurring in sixty-one texts. "Pride" is found mainly in the prophets and the books of poetry.

Psalm 47:4

He chose our heritage for us,
the pride of Jacob whom he loves.

Ezek 24:21

'Say to the house of Israel, Thus says the Lord GOD : Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the pride of your power, the delight of your eyes, and the yearning of your soul, and your sons and your daughters whom you left behind shall fall by the sword.

Isa 2:10

Enter into the rock and hide in the dust
from before the terror of the LORD,
and from the splendor of his majesty.

The main Hebrew root is g'h; the most common term is gaa'own, which occurs a total of twenty-three times. Included are the ideas of arrogance, cynical insensitivity to the needs of others, and presumption. Pride is both a disposition/attitude and a type of conduct.

A synonym gaabaah means "to be high." While used in a variety of senses, the normal meaning is pride or arrogance, in particular "an inner attitude of pride," often linked with parts of the human body (Isa 2:11,17). There is pride of the eyes (Ps 101:5; Isa 5:15); of the heart (Ezek 28:2,5,17); of the spirit (Prov 16:18; Eccl 7:8); and of one's mouth/speech (1 Sam 2:3). A classic text includes the words "pride," "conceit," "arrogance," and "haughtiness" (Jer 48:29).

Jer 48:29

We have heard of the pride of Moab—he is very proud—
of his loftiness, his pride, and his arrogance, and the haughtiness of his heart.

Fifteen Old Testament texts (niv) contain the word "arrogance," nearly half of them (7) in the prophets (Isa 2:17; 9:9; 13:11; Jer 13:15; 48:29; Ezek 7:10; Hos 5:5; 7:10). Five references are in poetical texts (Job 35:12; Ps 10:2; 17:10; 73:8; Prov 8:13), and three others are found in Deut 1:43; 1 Sam 2:3; 15:23.

What constitutes a "proud" person? The negative sense points to a sinful individual who shifts ultimate confidence from God to self. In the Wisdom literature, "the proud" are distinct from "the righteous" and "the humble." Here the term is applied to non-Israelites, rather than to Israel. The Septuagint uses huperephanos, meaning one who is insolent, presumptuous, or arrogant, a scoffer or a mocker.

Psalm 119:21

You rebuke the insolent, accursed ones, who wander from your commandments.

Psalm 119:51

The insolent utterly deride me, but I do not turn away from your law.

Proverbs 3:34

Toward the scorers he is scornful, but to the humble he gives favor.

When the prophets accuse Israel of pride, the word hubristees connotes a wanton, insolent person. Thus, in the Old Testament books, the prideful are generally associated with the wicked, the arrogant, the presumptuous, and those who are insolent toward God.

Jer 13:8-9

⁸ Then the word of the LORD came to me: ⁹ "Thus says the LORD: Even so will I spoil the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem.

Hosea 5:5

The pride of Israel testifies to his face;
Israel and Ephraim shall stumble in his guilt;
Judah also shall stumble with them.

Most of the adjectives joined with "pride" in the Old Testament are negative in connotation, including words such as "stubborn" (Lev 26:19), "overweening" (Isa 16:6), "willful" (Isa 10:12), and "great" (Jer 13:9). In one instance the positive phrase "everlasting pride" describes the status of a restored Zion (Isa 60:15). Most of the synonyms give a negative sense: contempt (Ps 31:18); wrongdoing (Job 33:17); trust (Ps 62:10); arrogance (Prov 8:13; Isa 2:11,17; 9:9); insolence (Isa 16:6); and conceit (Jer 48:29). An exception is "glory" (Isa 4:2).

Finally, in the Old Testament, what are some of the results of pride? It led to Uzziah's downfall (2 Chron 26:16); it hardened the heart of Nebuchadnezzar (Dan 5:20); it goes before destruction (Prov 16:18); it does not seek God (Ps 10:4); it brings disgrace (Prov 11:2); it breeds quarrels (Prov 13:10); it deceives (Jer 49:16; Obad 3); it brings low (Prov 29:23; Isa 2:11; 23:9); it humbles (Isa 2:17; Dan 4:37).

The New Testament. In the New Testament, the abstract use of hubris (pride) is completely absent. Rather, it refers to ill-treatment, hardship, disaster, or a violent or insolent person (Acts 27:10, 21; 2 Cor 12:10; 1 Tim 1:13). The word huperephanos and its derivatives occur six times; twice in the Gospels (Mark 7:22; Luke 1:51) and four times in the Epistles (Rom 1:30; 2 Tim 3:2; James 4:6; 1 Peter 5:5). In its Greek background, the word meant overweening, arrogant, and haughty.

1 Tim 1:12-13

¹² I thank him who has given me strength, Christ Jesus our Lord, because he judged me faithful, appointing me to his service, ¹³ though formerly I was a blasphemer, persecutor, and insolent opponent.

Rom 1:28-32

²⁸ And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. ²⁹ They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, ³⁰ slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, ³¹ foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. ³² Though they know God's decree that those who practice such things deserve to die, they not only do them but give approval to those who practice them.

James 4:6-7

But he gives more grace. Therefore it says, "God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble." ⁷ Submit yourselves therefore to God.

1 Peter 5:5

Likewise, you who are younger, be subject to the elders. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for "God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble."

Mark 7:22 includes arrogance in a list of vices, the only such example in the Gospel texts.

Mark 7:14-23

¹⁴ And he called the people to him again and said to them, "Hear me, all of you, and understand: ¹⁵ There is nothing outside a person that by going into him can defile him, but the things that come out of a person are what defile him." ¹⁷ And when he had entered the house and left the people, his disciples asked him about the parable. ¹⁸ And he said to them, "Then are you also without understanding? Do you not see that whatever goes into a person from outside cannot defile him, ¹⁹ since it enters not his heart but his stomach, and is expelled?" (Thus he declared all foods clean.) ²⁰ And he said, "What comes out of a person is what defiles him. ²¹ For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. ²³ All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

(Two other lists are found in Paul's letters [Rom 1:29-31; Gal 5:19-23].)

God opposes the proud (Prov 3:34). Both James (4:6) and Peter (1 Peter 5:5) cite this Old Testament text, including the word huperephanos, the "proud/arrogant" person. It stands in contrast to the word "humble," a quality that God honors. Paul's list (Rom 1:30) includes hubristees, one who behaves arrogantly toward those who are too weak to retaliate.

Finally, a remarkable example of huperephanos occurs in the Magnificat (Luke 1:51). Using language largely from the Old Testament, Mary tells how God will scatter the proud—possibly a reference to a specific group in society and political life. They are characterized by suppressing the masses, the poor and humble in Israel. God will overthrow them and exalt the lowly. While his wrath is upon the proud, he will visit the humble in grace.

Luke 1:46-55

⁴⁶ And Mary said,

"My soul magnifies the Lord,

⁴⁷ and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,

⁴⁸ for he has looked on the humble estate of his servant.

For behold, from now on all generations will call me blessed;

⁴⁹ for he who is mighty has done great things for me,
and holy is his name.

⁵⁰ And his mercy is for those who fear him
from generation to generation.

⁵¹ He has shown strength with his arm;

he has scattered the proud in the thoughts of their hearts;
52 he has brought down the mighty from their thrones
and exalted those of humble estate;
53 he has filled the hungry with good things,
and the rich he has sent empty away.
54 He has helped his servant Israel,
in remembrance of his mercy,
55 as he spoke to our fathers,
to Abraham and to his offspring forever."

Walter M. Dunnnett

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PRIDE is inordinate and unreasonable self-esteem, attended with insolence and rude treatment of others.

1. "It is sometimes," says a good writer, "confounded with vanity, and sometimes with dignity; but to the former passion it has no resemblance, and in many circumstances it differs from the latter. Vanity is the parent of loquacious {very talkative} boasting, and the person subject to it, if his pretences be admitted has no inclination to insult the company. The proud man, on the other hand, is naturally silent, and wrapped up in his own importance, seldom speaks but to make his audience feel their inferiority." Pride is the high opinion that a poor, little, contracted soul entertains of itself. Dignity consists in just, great, and uniform actions, and is the opposite of meanness.

2. Pride manifests itself by praising ourselves, adoring our persons, attempting to appear before others in a superior light to what we are; contempt and slander of others; envy at the excellences others possess; anxiety to gain applause; distress and rage when slighted; impatience of contradiction, and opposition to God himself.

3. The evil effects of pride are beyond computation. It has spread itself universally in all nations, among all characters; and as it was the first sin, as some suppose, that entered into the world, so it seems the last to be conquered. It may be considered as the parent of discontent, ingratitude, covetousness, poverty, presumption, passion, extravagance, bigotry, war, and persecution. In fact, there is hardly an evil perpetrated but pride is connected with it in a proximate or remote sense.

4. To suppress this evil, we should consider what we are. "If we could trace our descents," says Seneca, "we should find all slaves to come from princes, and all princes from slaves. To be proud of knowledge is to be blind in the light; to be proud of virtue is to poison ourselves with the antidote; to be proud of authority is to make our rise our downfall." The imperfection of our nature, our scanty knowledge, contracted powers, narrow conceptions, and moral inability are strong motives to excite us to humility. We should consider, also, what punishments this sin has brought on mankind. See the cases of Pharaoh, Haman, Nebuchadnezzar, Herod, and others; how particularly it is prohibited ([Prov 16:18](#); [1 Peter 5:1](#); [James 4:6](#); [Prov 29:23](#)); what a torment it is to its possessor ([Est 5:13](#)); how soon all things of a sublunary nature will end; how disgraceful it renders us in the sight of God, angels, and men; what a barrier it is to our felicity and communion with God; how fruitful it is of discord; how it precludes our usefulness, and renders us really contemptible. Comp. Blackie, *Morals*, p, 244; Edwards, *Works*; Robert Hall, *Works*; Bates, *Works*; Brown, *Philosophy of the Mind*; *Wesl. Mag.* 1846, p. 1113; 1847, p. 548 sq.; Malcom, *Theol. Index*, s.v. See [Humility](#).

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The opposite of pride is humility.

Once I was given an award for my humility but they took it back when I wore it.

A lady said to Mr. Bonar, "I will have you know that I have not sinned for six months." Mr. Bonar replied, "And you are right proud of that."

"I am so sinful that sometimes I don't think I am sinful." Robert Brimsmead

One of the greatest insights into the working of the devil is C. S. Lewis' [Screwtape Letters](#). Screwtape writes letters to Wormwood who is an imp assigned to corrupt a "patient." A patient is a new Christian. In Letter XIV:

"My dear Wormwood,

The most alarming thing in your last account of the patient is that he is making none of those confident resolutions which marked his original conversion. No more lavish promises of perpetual virtue, I gather not even the expectation of an endowment of "grace" for life, but only a hope for the daily and hourly pittance to meet the daily and hourly temptations! This is very bad!

I only see one thing to do at the moment. Your patient has become humble; have you drawn his attention to the fact? All virtues are less formidable to us once the man is aware that he has them, but this is especially true of humility...."

That will serve as an introduction to the "seven deadly sins" and when providence affords another opportunity we will consider number two in the list:

Envy is the desire for others' traits, status, abilities, or situation.