

7 Difficult Sins To Avoid

We are all familiar with sin. We have all committed sin. Only Jesus is free from ever committing sin (1 John 3:5). It is our nature as humans to sin. It even tells us in the Bible that we are all born with a sin nature (Psalm 51:5). So does this mean that it was God's intent for us to be sinful and do evil? Many of the quotes found in this article come from the book Sinning Like a Christian - A New Look at the Seven Deadly Sins by William H. Willimon. Willimon stated that "Evil arises with the advent of humanity, not with God's creation of the world. Jesus said that evil arose, not from the way the world is set up, but from what comes up out of the human heart (Mark 7:25)."

If God did not create evil or the desire for sin, why does it exist? After God finished His magnificent creation with mankind, He stated that it was all "very good." He loved man very much and desired man to love Him in return. So knowing that, He could not force man to love Him (for this would not be true love), He gave man "free will" to decide whether or not he wanted to love God. Man was to demonstrate his love for God by showing God respect and by obeying Him. Eventually Adam and Eve showed God their decision when they committed the first or "original" sin. But what is sin? Willimon states that "... sin is the problem we have between us and God. It is rebellion against our true Sovereign, an offense against the way the Creator has created us to be."

When we think of sin we normally think of the breaking of one or more of the ten commandments given by God in the old testament (Ex 20:3-17). The first four of God's ten commandments tell us how to develop a proper relationship with God, and the last six commandments tell us how to develop a proper relationship with other people. God did not give us these commandments so He could punish us if we broke them: He gave them to us because He knew that if we abided by these commandments we would be able to live a joyful life. Although all sin is equally wrong in God's eyes, we as humans tend to think of the breaking of some of these commandments as more serious sins, especially the sins of murder and stealing, than some other more "trivial" sins.

There are some sins which have been characterized as the seven deadly sins. These sins are what might be considered "small and trivial". Willimon even states that "the seven seem so small, so ordinary and unavoidable, compared with so many other sins,..." So what are these seven deadly sins and why are they considered deadly? Although the seven have been described in different ways and different words over the years, Willimon states that they are: Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Greed, Gluttony and Lust. These seven deadly sins eat away at our souls and damage our relationships with other people and God. They prevent us from being all that God intended us to be. Now lets take a closer look at these seven deadly sins. Also read the scriptures listed, for God's word is true and wise and it is always wise to trust and obey his teachings. (*Read Rom. 1:28-32, Prov. 6:16-19, Gal. 5:19-26*)

PRIDE

According to Willimon, "We as parents try to instill a sense of achievement, a desire for excellence, an aspiration to do the best that you can do, a sense of 'self-worth' (Pride) in our children, but too much Pride is called arrogance." He said that Spinoza put it like this, "Pride is thinking more highly of oneself than is just, out of love of oneself ... When we take too much credit for our lives and our achievements, when we come to look at our lives as products of our own striving rather than gifts, we are moving close to that idolatry in which the creature refuses to give due credit to the Creator." He says that "self-respect is one thing; self-infatuation is another." He later stated that "Pride is the prime example of sin as misdirected love." and that "Pride is otherwise admirable self-love (Jesus commands us to love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves) gotten out of hand, love that ought to be given only to God, given to the self as if the self were God." Willimon pointed out that "we are what we worship" and that Aquinas noted that "Pride is a turning-away from God. ... It is thinking of oneself as the Creator rather than the creature."

So how do we avoid pride? We must always give God credit for our abilities and the gifts He has provided us. We must learn to be grateful and thankful to others and learn to be humble. Proverbs 16:18 states that “Pride goes before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall.” Time and circumstances tend to have a way of bringing us to our knees when we get too proud of our selves. Although we are not to expect any reward in this lifetime for what we do for God, we will be rewarded for our earthly good works once we are in God’s heavenly kingdom. Even Jesus once said, “... all who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted.” (*Read Prov. 3:34, 1Peter 5:5-7, Mark 7:20-23*)

ENVY

“Envy is one of the few deadly sins that have a direct counterpart in the Ten Commandments, with a command against covetousness. Murder, adultery, and theft are things that we do; Envy is, like many of the other Seven, something we feel.” “To think a deed is to do it, as Jesus says when He equates lustful thoughts with adulterous acts. Matters of the heart matter; our dispositions and inclinations are, at least to Jesus, as significant as our actions.” “When we envy someone, we tend to magnify that person’s good fortune while at the same time minimizing our own.” “Envy gnaws, nibbles away at our consciousness.” Envy makes even our good friends into our competitors, our enemies, at least in our own minds.” “The saints have unanimously told us to shun competitive posturing, to relate ourselves only to God, as a remedy against Envy.” “In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says that love, Christian love, does not envy.” We as Christians are to be happy for others, for the gifts and blessings they have received. We are also to be grateful for the gifts and blessings we have received, and learn to be content with what we have. (*Read James 3:16, 1Tim.6:3-5*)

ANGER

“Anger is surely one of the most self-delusional and destructive, usually self-destructive and potentially violent, of the Seven Sins.” Anger is a strong emotion which can be a dangerous thing or a powerful motivating force for good. “Anger is that paradoxical sin which can be the engine that drives us on to do our best, or it can be that which incapacitates us and leads us to do our worst.” Willimon says that he is “inclined to believe that the sin of Anger depends upon frequency and its duration. Prolonged attachment to Anger is the bad thing, not the momentary bad-tempered outburst.” Also if anger is turned inward, suppressed, and not dealt with, it can lead to bitterness and depression, according to Willimon.

How should we deal with Anger? Jesus taught us in His “Lord’s Prayer” to say “... forgive us of our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us ...” We must learn how to forgive others as God has already forgiven us of our many sins. Also, as Willimon points out, “From Psalm 137 we obtain some insights for godly dealing with Anger: Anger is a natural, necessary response in the face of injustice. It is an acknowledgment that this is not the world as it is meant to be, not the world as God intended. The Anger should be expressed, preferably in church, in prayer, in conversation with God. We have a God who is good enough and great enough to receive our Anger, to take even the most raw human emotions and weave them into his purposes. Anger can be expressed, but ought not be acted upon without the greatest of care. ‘Vengeance is mine,’ says the Lord, not ours. Gross injustice, great Anger, ought to be given to God as our offering, our confession that we have come to a place in our lives where we are unable to fix that which afflicts us.” (*Read Mat.5:21-24, Eph.4:26-27, 31-32, James1:19-20*)

SLOTH

Willimon also said, “In Scripture, it is the activist sins of commission, rather than the lazy sins of omission, that seem to be most troubling to God. It was the hard-working, eager beaver, purpose-driven believers, the actively righteous who suffered his harshest rebukes.” So what is so bad about Sloth? “What people sometimes call doubt is more often, more properly called Sloth.” Sloth is seen in some people with their “simple unwillingness to take the trouble to believe.” “Faith requires active response, engagement with God, a willingness to be formed and transformed by God’s work in us.” God has given each believer spiritual gifts and talents to help others who are in need - emotionally, financially,

physically, or spiritually. We are being lazy if we are not using our God given talents or gifts to help others. "It is sinful to be so humble about one's God-given gifts that one fails to use them." When we choose to not fulfill God's purpose for our life, we are being slothful.

Sloth has also been defined as "excessive self-pity, a sad self-centeredness of the heart all curled up in itself." Sloth is when we no longer feel compassion for those less fortunate than ourselves and develop the "I don't care" attitude. "Sloth is that sin that ... (makes us) unable to consider the possibility that the man asking us for a handout is an invitation to get closer to God." (*Read Prov. 6:6-11, 13:4, 19:15, 21:25, Ecc.10:18*)

GREED

It says in the Bible that God will provide the true believer with what he or she needs, and God wants us to live an abundant life. So does this mean that we should be getting everything that we want if we are Christians? First of all, God knows what each of us truly need and He will provide for those needs, and secondly, we as "born again" Christians should have a desire for heavenly things more than earthly possessions.

So when does the desire for the abundant life become tainted by greed? Good things like human creativity, drive, and ambition can easily slip into greed. Our desires can guide us to do our best for good, but they can also be the causes of some of our worst misery. In greed, our desires bring out the worst in us. Willimon states that James Ogilvy said "Greed turns love into lust, leisure into sloth, hunger into gluttony, honor into pride, righteous indignation into anger, and admiration into envy." Again we can see how all seven of these "deadly" sins are entangled upon each other.

Greed can cause us to break God's commandments to not covet and to not worship false idols. When desire causes us to not be satisfied with what we have and therefore covet what belongs to others, this kind of desire becomes perverted desire or greed. Willimon also points out that "Aquinas says that Greed is a kind of self-delusion, since riches have a way of deceiving us that we can attain self-sufficiency. In other words, Greed becomes a false god, a matter of misdirected worship." Matthew 6:21 states that "Where our money is, our heart tends to be."

Advertising is notorious for moving us quickly from that which we desire to what we need. It feeds on unfocused, relentless desire. Advertising, if done right, will not only meet our needs with its products it is trying to sell, but it will create in us a need or desire. It will make us think that we really need that which we can truly live without. There is a thin line between want and need or desire and necessity.

As a Christian we must learn to know when enough is enough and be satisfied with the many blessings God has bestowed upon us. Willimon said "The noble, philosophical soul is the one who no longer needs all the stuff that makes lesser mortals at least temporarily happy." He also thinks that a major theological justification for giving to the church and to the poor and for tithing of our income, is as a remedy for greed. Willimon also put it this way, "Perhaps we ought to think of the church as schooling in desire, learning how to want the right things in the right way and the right proportions." and we should learn to respond as such, "Yes, we could afford it, but we are not going to buy it, because it does little to contribute to the basic goodness of our lives." "Furthermore, consumerism does not mesh well with the gospel. The Christian faith says that church is not about getting what we want but rather about getting what God wants. The Christian faith is God's idea of a good time." (*Read Prov.1:15-19, 15:27, Eph.4:17-19*)

GLUTTONY

We must eat to live, so why should we be so concerned when people eat more than they necessarily need? It is ironic that even though eating is necessary for us to survive, habitual overeating becomes detrimental to the body. Whenever we abuse our God given gifts, as free will, sexual love, and abundant food, we are taking advantage of God's goodness for us. We are not living according to God's will for our life. Anytime we make anything more important than God, it is a sin. Sin is anything which

goes against God's will and therefore damages our personal relationship with God. Willimon said "Anytime we 'make the belly a god' (Philippians 3:19) and obsess over it, worrying about it too much positively or negatively, this would be considered Gluttony, not only as self-abuse but also as abuse of our relationship with God."

Ecclesiastes 10:17 warns against over-indulgence. Willimon points out the idea that mere eating is not the problem. As he puts it, "In Gluttony, it is the excessiveness that is the sin, excessive consumption as well as excessive attentiveness to food." "Addiction, bulimia, alcoholism, and the life of the gourmand probably would be classified under the rubric of Gluttony." Also over-indulgence in food itself is not the only problem when it comes to Gluttony. He also points out that excessive use of other things as noise, TV, cars, etc. may fall into the category of Gluttony too. He said "Gluttony consists in that little word 'too'." Too much of a good thing is often not good for us. "Life's necessities, when abused, become life's threat." (*Read Prov.23:21, Phil.3:18-19*)

LUST

There is just about no sin more difficult to banish from our thoughts, by ourselves, than the sin of Lust. "Sin breeds sin, and every time we succumb to tendencies of Lust, the tendency to Lust strengthens within us."

"God created us for mutuality, and the mutual sharing of sexuality, yet our disordered state has made even sex a curse, a war between the sexes, a means of one gender idolatrously lording over another." Willimon also noted that "our hearts are created to be restless until they find rest in the proper object of their love. Again, as with some of the other Seven, the sin of Lust is not in the desire but rather in having an improper, false object of our desire."

"Desire is a good, God-given thing. Desire misdirected, misused, leads to sin." "The sin in so many of the Seven is in our perversion of the good, and with Lust it's no different. The unabashed, innocent, mutual eroticism of the youthful Song of Solomon is sex as it is meant to be." Willimon also pointed out that our lives are created and owned by God, therefore all of life, even our sexual life, is to be lived for the glory of God. (*Read Prov.6:24-29, Mat.5:27-28, Gal.5:16-17, 1Ths.4:3-5, Titus 2:11-13, 1John 2:15-17*)

CONCLUSION

As Willimon has put it "Because the Seven tend to burrow down so deep in our everyday lives, tend to infect just about everything that we do, one must begin with seemingly small, mundane, daily acts of defiance and resistance. Thanks be to God that the church does not expect us to engage the Seven on our own, or we would never have any victories against sin.

Willimon says that "a disciple of Christ is someone who, by the grace of God, has somehow been given the ethical resources to be able to look upon all the wiles of the world and say no." "No one as an individual can resist sin. God does not expect heroic individualism from us but rather membership in a family, a new people, a holy nation called Israel and Church. As lonely, weak, and detached individuals we are no match for the wiles of the Devil. In a group that confirms our struggle to be disciples, we can be so much more than we could have been if left to our own devices. The ultimate 'remedy for sin' from a Christian point of view is not tight-fisted moral determination to be better, but is rather baptism by which we are placed in a family that enables us, even us, to be holy."

"We are called not only to name and confess our sin but also to be free of our sin." "We must not only want to do better, but we must have specific, orderly, methodical steps to do better." "By the grace, (strength, guidance, and love) of God we can get better." To grow in your relationship with God and grow strong in resisting sin, pray and read your Bible every day, confess your sins to God and ask for His guidance, and learn to trust His word.