THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Lars Wilhelmsson
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PREFACE

The Seven Deadly Sins are also known as Cardinal Sins that have been used since early Christian times (initially in the 4th century but more prominently in the 14th century) to instruct believers concerning man’s tendency to sin because of his fall in the Garden of Eden.

St. John Cassian (A.D. 360-435) first identified these attitudes that underlie sins. This list provides a framework for self-knowledge because it gives insight to understanding our weaknesses, faults and actions.¹

Greek monastic theologian Evagrius of Pontus first drew up a list of eight offenses and evil human passions. His list included gluttony, lust, avarice (covetousness), sadness, anger, acedia (not to care), vainglory and pride. The seriousness of evil with each vice was dependent on their fixation with self and thus pride was considered most egregious.²

Pope Gregory the Great reduced this list to seven vices in the 6th century by combining acedia with sadness, vainglory and pride and adding envy. He weighed the severity of each sin by the degree to which they offend against love and concluded that pride was thus the most wicked.³

St. Thomas Aquinas contradicted the notion that the seriousness of the sins could legitimately be ranked in such a way.

The vice called “sadness” was replaced by sloth in the 17th century.

Along with these “Deadly Sins” were “Heavenly Virtues” that were in the forefront of the teaching ministry of the Church in the Middle Ages. The Heavenly Virtues were humility to cure pride, kindness to cure envy, abstinence to cure gluttony, chastity to cure lust, patience to cure wrath (anger), liberality (generosity) to cure greed and diligence to cure sloth.

The Roman Catholic Church has divided sin into two categories: venial sins, which are considered relatively minor, and mortal sins, which are viewed as more severe. Whereas a venial sin will have a negative influence, a mortal sin threatens one’s very eternal life:

"Mortal sin, by attacking the vital principle within us - that is, charity - necessitates a new initiative of God's mercy and a conversion of heart which is normally accomplished [for Catholics] within the setting of the sacrament of reconciliation.”⁴

The deadly sins are considered deadly because they engender other sins, that is, they are the origin of other sins.
The Medieval and early Renaissance periods had at least a dozen elaborate Christian models of sin. The most popular one lists seven sins and subdivides them into three “spiritual” sins and four “corporal” sins. Although all these were considered deadly, the spiritual sins were generally acknowledged to be more dangerous than the physical or bodily sins.

What contributed to the emphasis on such sins were European artists of the time who depicted these sins in dramatic ways.

The biblical basis for this list of sin is taken from the book of Proverbs in which Solomon speaks of “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,
7. a man who stirs up dissension among brothers” (Pr 6:16-19).

In his epistle to the Christians at Galatia, Paul includes the traditional sins but also adds to it:

“sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery; idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like” (Gal 5:19-21).

Then Paul ends with a warning:

“I warn you, as I did before, that those who live like this will not inherit the kingdom of God” (v. 21).

In the 15th century there were engravings by George Pencz in which he used women and animals to depict such sins.

Ernst and Johanna Lehner in their book *The Picture Book of Devils, Demons and Witchcraft* associated each of the deadly sins with the following punishments in hell:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sin</th>
<th>Punishment</th>
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<tr>
<td>Pride</td>
<td>Broken on the wheel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Envy</td>
<td>Freezing water</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anger</td>
<td>Dismembered alive</td>
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<tr>
<td>Sloth</td>
<td>Thrown in snake pits</td>
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<tr>
<td>Greed</td>
<td>Cauldrons of boiling oil</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gluttony</td>
<td>Eat rats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lust</td>
<td>Smothered in fire and brimstone</td>
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The Medieval Church also assembled a list of the following seven good works in the catechism as cures to the seven deadly sins:

- Sheltering strangers
- Feeding the hungry
- Giving drink to those thirsting
- Clothing the naked
- Visiting the sick
- Ministering to the imprisoned
- Burying the dead

Following the Reformation one of the ways that the Protestants and Roman Catholics differentiated themselves from each other was tinkering with such lists.
INTRODUCTION
Many warn that focusing on vices such as the seven deadly sins will more likely lead to depression than prove helpful. They suggest that we should focus on virtues rather than vices. Although they have a point since we cannot adequately understand what is wrong unless we have an understanding of what is right, nevertheless they overlook the fact that if we are to move forward in our journey with God we cannot do so if we are held back by vices. Unless we learn to overcome negative attitudes, thoughts, words and deeds, we cannot expect to advance in our spiritual pilgrimage.

It is only by acknowledging the awfulness—the deadliness—of sin that our knowledge of grace is deepened.

The danger is that the self-examination that a treatment on the seven deadly sins encourages may lead to an unhealthy focus in which we end up spiritually flagellating ourselves and become filled with undue guilt, despondency and even despair.

One of the ways that many address sin is by works-righteousness. The problem with this approach is that by avoiding one ditch one falls into another ditch. After all, is the ditch of self-righteousness any less serious than the ditch of vices?

The biblical prescription is confession and repentance. Rooting out our vices is possible when we confess, that is, face our problem by uncovering it, call it what it actually is and seek to overcome it by God’s grace in dependence upon the Holy Spirit.

Only when we come to the end of ourselves and recognize our own spiritual bankruptcy can we hope to experience deliverance and freedom.

God has provided means of grace—spiritual disciplines—to build upon our confession and repentance. God’s sanctifying process shows us that a daily, moment-by-moment communion with Him increasingly sets us free from what holds us back in our walk with Him and leads us into greater intimacy with Him.
PRIDE

“The flowers of Christian graces grow under the shade of the cross, and the root
of them all is humility.”

–Keith L. Brooks

“It makes as much sense to talk of a proud Christian as it does to talk of a humble
devil.”

--Anonymous

“It was pride that changed angels into devils; it is humility that makes men as
angels.”

–St. Augustine

What is it that makes us independent . . . that makes us “do our own thing”? What is it
that keeps us from seeking God more? What is it that makes us fight to do His will? Why do we
have pockets of resistance toward God and others?

What is it that makes us hide any weaknesses, shortcomings, sins?

What is it that makes it so difficult for us to be honest . . . to be honest with God, with
ourselves, and with others?

What is it that makes us try to impress others . . . to look more intelligent than we really
are, richer than we really are, more influential and powerful than we really are? What is it that
makes us try to keep up with the Joneses? What is it that makes us want to associate with
influential and powerful people and not with poor and needy people? What is it that makes us
spend inordinate amount of time on our looks?

What is it that makes us selfish, self-centered and self-seeking? What is it that makes us
search for beauty, position, power, honor? What is it that makes us think that certain kinds of
jobs or chores are beneath us?

What is it that makes us restless and dissatisfied with what we have?

What is it that makes us overly competitive, where mere games become a serious thing,
and winning is a matter of life and death?

What is it that makes us resist change, reluctant to try new things? Why are we so afraid
to fail, to make mistakes?

What is it that makes us blind to our own faults but suspicious and critical of others?
When we achieve something, even spiritually, what is it that makes us feel we are better than others? What is it that makes us look down on others?

What is it that makes us be so easily offended? What is it that makes us want to get even, to have our pound of flesh? What is it that makes us so reluctant to forgive and so slow to heal? What is it that makes it virtually impossible to say such things as: “I was wrong.” “I’m sorry.” “Please, forgive me”?

The answer to all these questions is: Pride.

The Mother of all Sin

Pride is the mother of all sin. It is the principle that infects everything it touches.

Pride is the biggest obstacle to a life of discipleship, a life of following Jesus. Pride insists on its own terms what it means to follow Jesus.

Scripture addresses this sin more than any other because all other sin stem from this sin.

“There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him: haughty eyes . . .” (Pr 6:16-17).

“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be lowly in spirit and among the oppressed than to share plunder with the proud.” (16:18-19)

“The proud and arrogant man—‘Mocker’ is his name; he behaves with overweening pride” (21:24).

Pride is Seductive

Pride keeps us from being teachable, for it seduces us to think we know much more than we do. It makes us unrealistic about our abilities. Paul stated,

“For by the grace given me I say to every one of you: Do not think of yourself more highly than you ought, but rather think of yourself with sober judgment, in accordance with the measure of faith God has given you” (Ro 12:3).

Pride makes us exaggerate our strengths and minimize our weaknesses. Humility is a realistic understanding of our strengths and weaknesses.

Competence, ability, talent, beauty all come from God. Humility is recognizing that fact and giving credit where it belongs—to God.
The humble person does not deny his positive qualities, but he thankfully acknowledges that God is the one who gave them to him in the first place.

Pride is also deceptive in that it makes us think it is enough to go part of the way as long as there is no real cost to following Jesus.

Pride is never having to say we're sorry. Pride is never having to say we’re wrong.

Pride is competitive. C. S. Lewis put it:

“Pride . . . is competitive by its very nature—while the other vices are competitive only, so to speak, by accident. Pride gets no pleasure out of having something, only out of having more of it than the next man. We say that people are proud of being rich, or clever, or good-looking, but they are not. They are proud of being richer, or . . . [more clever], or better-looking than others. If everyone else became equally rich, or clever, or good-looking there would be nothing to be proud about. It is the comparison that makes you proud: the pleasure of being above the rest.” (Emphasis added)

Pride shouts, “Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.”

The Pride of Face, Race and Grace

Blinded by pride, the source of all sin, our focus becomes I, me and myself and we become guilty of the pride of face, race and grace.

The pride of face is physical pride by which we measure the value of human beings by their physique or beauty.

The pride of race is racial pride by which we elevate one or more races above others. And our own race or nationality always comes up on top.

The pride of grace is religious pride by which we give meticulous attention to external religious forms "having a form of godliness but denying its power" (2 Ti 3:5). Religious pride parades in religious clothing and makes us think we are righteous when in fact, we are self-righteous. It is viewing our own denomination as superior to all others, the answer to all other denominational weaknesses. It is seeing our own denomination as the “one true church.”
Other Prides

Intellectual pride makes us measure the value of human beings by their degree of intelligence.

Vocational pride makes us measure the value of human beings by their status, prestige, and power gained by their position.

Pride tells us not to let anyone know. That way, what is done in secret will stay there. Pride hides, suspects, criticizes, accuses, gloats, struts.

Pride is the sin of exalting ourselves and placing our own interests above the interests of others. Pride craves attention, admiration and devotion and will not share the limelight. The proud are in love with themselves and seek to call attention to their admirable qualities.

Ignorant about Ourselves

Pride keeps us from knowing the truth about ourselves. Pride blinds us to our own blindspots. It exaggerates our strengths and minimizes our weaknesses. It dulls us to the needs of others as we become blinded by our own wants.

Pride keeps us from seeing our own spiritual bankruptcy. Therefore we have a tendency to want to be saved because we are somehow worthy of God’s blessings. Our pride drives us to want to earn our salvation by doing enough good deeds so that God will owe us eternal life.

Jesus warned against thinking we are better than others:

“Two men went up into the temple to pray; the one a Pharisee, and the other a publican. The Pharisee stood and prayed to himself: ‘God, I thank You, that I am not as other men are, extortioners, unjust, adulterers or even as this publican. I fast twice in the week, I give tithes of all that I possess.

And the publican, standing afar off, would not lift up so much as his eyes to heaven, but smote upon his breast, saying “God, be merciful to me a sinner.”

(Lk 18:10-13)

Pride not only keeps us from God, but from each other. It hinders us from being open and honest because it always seeks to make an impression.
Many people who consider themselves to be Christians remain at odds with other believers because their pride will not allow them to make the confessions necessary to bring about reconciliation.

**Pride and Grace**

Over and over again we are told:

“All of you, clothe yourselves with humility toward one another, because, ‘God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble’” (1 Pe 5:5; Pr 3:34).

**Humility**

When St. Augustine was asked what the greatest virtues of the Christian faith are, he answered. The first greatest virtue of the Christian faith is humility. The second greatest virtue of the Christian faith is humility. The third greatest virtue of the Christian faith is humility.

Why is humility so important? It is the one virtue that makes all the other virtues possible. It is the gateway to all of God’s grace.

Humility is the answer to a superiority complex and it is the answer to an inferiority complex. Both stem from insecurity. Both make us think we have to perform, to prove ourselves. Humility makes it possible for us to be secure.

The answer to pride is humility. Jesus’ demand for discipleship—to deny ourselves to take up our cross—requires us first to bend our knees. We cannot pick up a cross without bending our knees. Bending our knees is a sign of humility, obedience and a declaration of dependence.

Humility opens us up to God. This helps us realize that we have been created by God. In fact, we find that we have been made in His very image and likeness.

Humility also makes it possible for us to recognize that God gave His very best—His one and only Son—to die on our behalf. This helps us realize we have been redeemed by God.

**Total Dependence**

And it is humility that enables us to see what our relation to God really is, the fact that we are His children and he is our heavenly Father. Therefore we live in total dependence upon Him.
John 15 shows us the way of dependence.

1. God the Son is the Vine and God the Father is the Gardener (v. 1).

2. The Father cuts dead branches and prunes live ones so we will be even more fruitful (v. 2).

3. Already clean—have life—because of the Word (v. 3).

4. As branches we must remain (abide) in the Vine if the Vine is to remain in the branch (v. 4).

5. If we remain in the vine we will bear much fruit (v. 5).

6. Just as apart from the Vine the branches are dead and thereby can do nothing, so when we are apart from Christ we can do nothing (v. 5).

7. If we do not remain in Christ we will be thrown into the fire and burned (v. 7).

8. If we remain in Christ and His Word remains in us we can ask whatever we wish, and it will be given us (v. 7).

9. By bearing much fruit we glorify our Father, the Gardener, and show ourselves to be Christ’s disciples (v. 8).

While pride seeks to bring glory to ourselves, humility brings glory to God, which is the very purpose of our existence.

Let us be humble toward God and toward each other and thus be Christ’s disciples and glorify our Father in heaven.
CHAPTER 2
ANGER
Matthew 5:21-26; Ephesians 4:26

“A man who can’t control his temper is like a city without defenses.”
--Jewish Proverb

“No man thinks clearly when his fists are clenched.”
–George Jean Nathan

**Anger is the one deadly sin we all try to justify.** This is so even though anger has disarmed us, robbed us of our testimony, and injured our relationships and home life.

Anger is no small thing. Unless understood, acknowledged, and kept under control, anger will slay us and others.

Anger is not easy to define. The following definitions give us a clue:

“An emotional reaction of hostility that brings personal displeasure either to ourselves or to someone else.”

“A strong feeling of displeasure aroused by a real or supposed wrong.”

**Anger is caused by various things such as injustice, humiliation, loss, and frustration.** Relating to injustice, a proverb states,

“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Pr 15:1).

**Any time our rights, or our imagined rights are violated, we are in danger of anger.** In fact, it is natural that we feel some anger when we are not treated with the fairness and respect with which every human being should be treated. Frustration is passive anger in which a sequence of irritating events during the day can build up pressure until finally a relatively insignificant event can trigger an eruption.

Anger has various **phases**.

1. It can begin with **mild irritation** in which we have an innocent experience of being upset.

2. Mild irritation usually turn into **indignation** where we have a feeling that something must be answered or avenged. Both irritation and indignation can go unexpressed, though often it is not. In fact, such feelings typically lead to unfair exaggerations and abusive language which result in put downs and insults.
3. If fed, indignation leads to **wrath**, which never goes unexpressed.

4. Then it increases to **fury**, which is a temporary loss of emotional control and tends to lead to violence.

5. The final phase is **rage**, which is a loss of control and involves acts of violence.

Legitimate Anger

There are some circumstances in which anger is permissible, a defensible reaction in certain situations. After all, doesn’t the Bible point out that in our anger we are not to sin? Yes it does in Ephesians 4:26 which states:

“**In your anger do not sin**: do not let the sun go down while you are still **angry**, and do not give the devil a foothold.”

While some anger is sinful, some is not. But no anger is to outlast the day, to be prolonged. Otherwise it gives a **foothold to Satan**.

The Greek philosopher Aristotle warned:

“All who can become angry—that is easy; but to be angry with the right **person**, and to the right **degree**, and at the right **time**, and for the right **purpose**, and in the right **way”—that is not within everybody’s power and is not easy.” (Emphasis added)

Anger is a **God-given emotion**. God has anger (“Then My anger will be kindled . . .” (Dt 31:17; also “the anger of the Lord” is mentioned 18 times in the Old Testament). It seems reasonable to believe then that God made us with anger since He made us in His own image and likeness (Gn 1:26-27).

And what about Jesus Himself? Wasn’t He angry? God the Father’s and Jesus’ anger justifies our anger. But what made God the Father angry?

- **Idolatry**—God was angry with Solomon when he allowed foreign wives to turn his heart to idolatry (1 Kgs 11:9).

- **Injustice and Exploitation**—God was angry when His enemies assumed positions of jurisdiction outside their rights, that is, when they take away the rights of the ones who are in the right (Isa 5:22-23).

What made Jesus’ angry?
- **Hardheartedness** and insensitivity to human need (Mt 23:2-33; Mk 3:5)
- **Willful Spiritual Blindness** (v. 5)
- **Injustice and Exploitation** (11:15-17; Jn 2:13-17)

Anger is a proper response to hardheartedness, insensitivity, spiritual blindness, injustice and exploitation. Therefore failure to get angry can signal a **defect of character**. It was William Wilberforce’s and Abraham Lincoln’s anger, for example, that led them to fight the inhumane practice of slavery. Lack of anger at inhumane attitudes and practices is un-Christian.

Anger is also a legitimate response to **deep loss** such as separation, divorce, death, especially suicide. After all, such events leave us with serious pain. In such instances it is not the anger that is the issue, but our response to it. With deep loss extended time is necessary for emotional healing to take place (anywhere from three months to two years). However, if we do not seek the Lord for healing we will end up in prolonged anger resulting in depression and even despair.

### Illegitimate Anger

Notice that Jesus never displayed anger because His **ego was bruised**. Yet this is the main reason why we get angry. We get angry when our feelings are hurt and our ego is deflated. We get angry when someone lets us down or takes advantage of us. There is great pleasure in anger. Pastor and writer Frederick Buechner perceptively analyses anger for us this way:

> “Of the seven deadly sins, anger is probably **the most fun**. To lick your wounds, smack your lips over grievances long past, roll over your tongue the prospect of bitter confrontations still to come, savor to the last toothsome morsel both the pain you are given and the pain you are giving back—is a feast fit for a king. The chief drawback is that what you are wolfing down is yourself. The skeleton at the feast is you.”

(Emphasis added)

Most anger is **selfish and self-centered**. It is an attempt to strike out or strike back due to egotism. While anger can be legitimate and even healthy, it also can be destructive.

Jesus warned:

> “You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, ‘Do not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment. But I tell you that **anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment**. Again, anyone who says to his brother, ‘Raca,’ is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, ‘You fool!’ will be in danger of the fire of hell.”
Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother **has something against you**, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be **reconciled** to your brother; then come and offer your gift” (Mt 5:21-24).

The point Jesus is making here is that **just as lust is the seed of adultery, so anger is the seed of murder.** Studies show that eighty percent of all murders are committed by people who have some relationship with the victim. Somebody gets a gun or knife handy, and tragedy results. According to hospital records, innumerable parents have inflicted serious injuries upon their small children in fits of temper. We are told that more children under five years of age are killed by their parents than die of disease.

The word “Raca” is related to the Aramaic word for “empty” and means “empty-headed” or “stupid.” To talk to someone in such a way makes us answerable to the court of man—the Sanhedrin, the Supreme Court. However, the word “fool” means “good-for-nothing” and thus is more serious. Such disrespect to another human being makes us liable to the fires of hell says Jesus.

You have probably heard the motto: “Don’t get mad, get even.” Getting even is a form of anger since anger stimulates a longing to see the “evildoer” writhe in psychological, if not physical, agony for the wrongs committed.

The Bible states that

“A **quick-tempered man does foolish things**, and a crafty man is hated” (Pr 14:17).

“A **patient** man has great understanding, but a quick-tempered man displays folly.” (v. 29)

“Better a **patient** man than a warrior, a man who **controls** his **temper** than one who takes a city” (16:32).

“The **anger** of man does not work the righteousness of God” (Jas 1:20).

**The Home**

The family provides the context for most expressions of anger because of the issue of **safety.** In the home we feel less restraint than we do from society. The family seems to be a separate world, distinct from the rest of our lives. We sense that we can express ourselves with our families without losing their affection and support. Therefore most of us seem to think that it’s okay to do things at home which we would never do outside. We believe we can “get away” with our outbursts without paying much, if any, price.
The truth is that the family usually pays the price. Anger, like a shotgun, may come on quickly and subside quickly, but the bullets of hurt are devastatingly felt by the victims for a long time.

HOW TO DEAL WITH AND OVERCOME ANGER

1. Key to overcoming anger is understanding it. Paul Hauck has outlined six levels people move through in getting angry:

   1) “I want something.”
   2) “I didn’t get what I wanted and am frustrated.”
   3) “It is awful and terrible not to get what I want.”
   4) “You shouldn’t frustrate me! I must have my way.”
   5) “You’re bad for frustrating me.”
   6) “Bad people ought to be punished.”

   Our search for better control begins when we ask God to help us discover the specific causes of anger. To take the power out of anger we need to analyze its deception and distortion. By seeing anger for what it is helps us disarm its mystical hold over us.

   In cases where we get angry all or most of the above steps are found. Steps 1 and 2 are true for us all. In step 3 our perception of truth begins to break down. We don’t like to be frustrated, but being frustrated is not as terrible as we may think. The retreat to irrationality and uncontrolled anger continues with the lies we tell ourselves in steps 4 through 6. Why must we have our way? Jesus didn’t. Nor did His disciples! Who says people are bad just because they frustrate us? Who says bad people ought to be punished? God said, “It is mine to avenge; I will repay” (Dt 32:35; Ro 12:19).

2. Take responsibility for your anger. When people get angry, they often say, “I just couldn’t help myself. I don’t know what came over me.” The implication is that the anger springs from some external source, and we are only the innocent victims. If so, then God could hardly hold us responsible. While it is true that things do happen that trigger psychological response which we label anger, at the point that this signal goes from the body to the brain, we become responsible for our actions. Our response to the signal, not the signal itself, constitutes the sin. Thus we choose to be angry or at least choose a response to our impulse of anger.

   If we had no control over our anger, how come most of it occurs in the privacy of our homes? How come that so-called “uncontrollable anger” does not usually occur in front of our boss or in front of someone we like to impress?
Fear also leads to anger for some people. It is a defense mechanism against the lack of control we feel when we are afraid. Parents sometimes find themselves angry when their children get hurt. This is displaced anger since it is the result of not knowing how to deal with fear. People who fear close relationships with others often become angry and drive people away. People who are afraid of being hurt use anger to hurt other people before they hurt them.

We need to see fear for what it is as well as hurt and frustration and ask God to help us deal with these emotions in a responsible and reasonable way.

3. Go to God in prayer and honestly and freely express your anger to God. Since God knows what we think and feel anyway, we might as well be open and honest about how we feel with Him. He can take it! People cannot. David shows us how we can do this in the book of Psalms. Study it and learn to be transparent with God.

4. Make things right by apologizing if you have hurt someone by your anger. Plan a constructive confrontation in which you humbly take responsibility for your anger and ask for forgiveness.

5. We also need to acknowledge that there is a payoff in getting angry. Control, intimidation, is the main payoff. People come to our aid, attend to our needs, make every effort to make life more comfortable, etc. People find themselves walking on eggshells for fear they will make the person even angrier.

6. We need to look for the cues that trigger our emotions. When we find them, we need to avoid them until we have grown beyond them. As we have seen, there is always a pattern to our anger. Notice the beginning stages and nip it in the bud.

7. Look for exaggeration. It is natural to demonize the offender when anger sets in for it blinds us to reality. In moments of anger, even the people we love will appear unattractive--a bit defective and repulsive. We need to ask ourselves if there were extenuating factors that contributed to what the other person said or did? If so, this does not excuse that person, but it makes it easier for us to understand why the person may have fallen into the trap of temptation.

8. In our communication we must first be quick to listen. James put it:

“My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you” (Jas 1:19-21).
James calls anger “moral filth” and “evil.” Solomon gave a similar advice:

“The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools” (Ecc 7:8-9).

In other words, “Don’t be a fool by flying off the handle!”

As someone put it,

“The two best times to keep your mouth shut are when you’re swimming and when you’re angry.”

It is easier to swallow angry words than to have to eat them!

Be patient with people and circumstances. Listen to people around you for what they’re really saying. Listen for the message, for its meaning, for the need or hurt conveyed delicately by the words.

9. **In our communication, we are also to be slow to speak** (Jas 1:19). When we are less hurried in speech, giving more thought to what we say and possible consequences, we will speak less rashly.

   Someone wisely stated,

   “The trouble with letting off steam is that it only gets you into more hot water.”

   Since God gave us two eyes to see with, two ears to hear with, but only one mouth to speak with, He must have intended that all of us would be swift to listen and slow to speak, slow to offer opinions, and still slower to express irritation and anger.

   When we write a letter in the heat of anger, we must make sure we do not mail it until that anger has subsided.

10. **Utilize personal conversation** in addressing anger. When John wrote his second and third letters, he dealt with some deeply disruptive problems in the church. Fellowship had been broken among some of the people, and John himself was being misjudged. The situation held the possibility of boiling anger and serious disruption. When he closed the letter, he said,

   “I hope to see you soon, and we will talk face to face” (3 Jn 14).
We can uncover the pain behind our anger more quickly in personal conversation than by any other means. In fact, soft, thoughtful conversation in which each person really understands the other not only helps to resolve anger but also goes a long way toward preventing it from arising.

11. **Leave vengeance to God.** The Bible is clear that we are to trust God to take care of vengeance:

   “Vengeance is mine; I will repay,” says the Lord” (Ro 12:19).

   Eventually all of us will pay for what we have done. The poet Friedrich Van Logauz put it:

   “Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small; Though with patience He stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all.”

   In the end, justice will come from God.

   Buddha pointed out,

   “Holding on to anger is like grasping a hot coal with the intent of throwing it at someone else; you are the one who gets burned.”

   Getting even diminishes and cheapens us. Acts of vengeance are never enough. Vengeance leaves those who seek it with a sense of having been cheated. It brings a hollow victory.

12. **Make sure anger is dealt with** otherwise it will turn inward and thus result in depression. Suppression is a coping mechanism often used by religious people to pretend that they have forgotten all about the evildoers and are not going to let themselves be bothered by such people. But what we suppress from our consciousness is only driven into the “underground” of the subconscious where it will haunt us. Buried anger simply re-emerges in other forms such as depression, gossip, resentment, sarcasm, or self-hatred.

   A determination never to get angry simply causes us to internalize the problem. So instead of a blustering red face, we get stomach ulcers!

   At the same time we must be careful about expressing our anger. Solomon observed:

   “A fool gives full vent to his anger, but a wise man keeps himself under control.”

   (Pr 29:11)
Expressing negative emotion may offer the pleasant sense of emotional release, but it brings no lasting solution. Only by dealing constructively with the root cause can we find a long-term solution to anger.

While many psychologists and psychiatrists recommend that we are free to express our anger, we also need to realize that expressing an emotion reinforces it and often causes us to feel the emotion even more intensely. Those who do loving acts usually feel love increase. Those who do kind deeds usually end up feeling kind. And those who express anger usually feel more anger.

Just notice people who claim that expressing anger really helps them. If this is so helpful, why do they continually feel the need to express their anger while those who control their anger don’t seem to have the same need to express it?

Although it may be healthier to express anger than to suppress it, expressing it usually intensifies it. Feelings and actions reinforce each other. Therefore we need to express our anger toward God . . . for He can take it. The psalms are a good example of this.

13. **We need to make sure we do not have displaced anger.** That is, to take out our anger on the innocent. Too many children, spouses, and animals suffer from displaced anger. Anger must be addressed honestly and appropriately, that is, openly expressing it to God who alone fully understands the hurts and frustrations we are feeling and it must be addressed gently with the person who has triggered such anger.

14. **Do not associate with hot-tempered people.** We are warned by Solomon, the wisest man that ever lived:

   “Do not make friends with a hot-tempered man, do not associate with one easily angered, or you may learn his ways and get yourself ensnared” (Pr 22:24).

   **Anger is infectious.** By associating with hot-tempered people we are more likely to justify and rationalize anger and thus imitate their lifestyle. Anger can easily become our defense against the unjust aggression we meet in contact with others.

15. We need to imitate Christ by actively doing good to those who have wronged us (e.g. Mt 5:40-44). It is difficult to remain angry toward those whom we humbly and lovingly serve. Our actions of obedience to God’s Word will free us from such anger as the natural result is changed feelings.
A child said to her mother before bedtime, “I have had such a happy day.” “I am glad,” her mother replied, “but tell me what made this day any different from yesterday?” The child answered, “Well, yesterday I let my thoughts and feelings push me around, and today I pushed my thoughts and feelings around.”

We can allow anger to push us around, or we can handle it in a Christian spirit. Submitting it to the control of Christ enables us to diffuse it and become

“quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry, for man’s anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires” (Jas 1:19-20).
CHAPTER 3
"Seek wealth, it’s good.”
   –Ivan Boesky

“That man is admired above all men who is not influenced by money.”
   --Cicero

“If you have something you cannot give away, then you don’t own it, it owns you.”
   –Albert Schweitzer

Many of us have either seen or heard of the bumper sticker which reads:

“He who dies with the most toys wins.”

Toys! The world is full of them. They come in every shape, size, color and price range imaginable.

And they are not just for kids! We all have them and love to play with them. Someone once remarked,

“The only difference between a man and a boy is the price of his toys.”

**Materialism commands our attention because we are material creatures.** We need food, shelter and clothing. And we work to provide these things for ourselves and loved ones.

Our society has built its economy on the production of things that people are conditioned to want, but do not really need. Many of the consumer goods we spend so much to buy did not even exist a generation ago. We buy these things because we have been manipulated into wanting them through advertising and peer pressure.

We are willing to work two jobs in order to satisfy these artificially created wants. We are willing to take time from our families so that we can buy those things which we are assured will express our love to our loved ones more than our mere presence ever could. We are willing to reject biblical principles of living in order to buy the consumer goods which the media prescribes as essential for the “good life.”
Not only do we have material needs, we experience many material joys. What would life be like without physical pleasures such as a lick of ice cream, the joy of sex, the satisfaction of athletic achievement, the enjoyment of a beautiful painting or a great concert? Although such things are not necessary, they add spice to life.

While needs are fixed and limited, artificially generated wants know no limits. Just when we get what we think we want, we see some new and “better” things. **God has provided enough to satisfy all our needs, but not enough to satisfy all our artificially created wants.** Of the getting of things, there will be no end.

Some of us are tired of hearing of the dangers of wealth and affluence while trying to make ends meet or worrying about the possibility of losing our jobs. But the issue is not wealth.

Rather it is that in the Junk Generation even the poorer classes have more “stuff” at their disposal than most of history’s wealthy. We don’t need to be rich to be affected by our materialistic society. Most of us, if we are honest, find ourselves **living cluttered lives in our cluttered world.** Our lives have become the byproduct of mass production. We are now appropriately identified as “consumers.”

*Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary* defines **materialism** as “a preoccupation with, or tendency to seek after or stress material rather than spiritual things.” A materialist is frustrated if he can’t get what he wants when he wants it.

**Greed (Avarice)**

**Greed (Avarice)** is one of the seven deadly sins and is a cousin of the sixth deadly sin—gluttony—in that like gluttony, greed has to do with **never being satisfied. Greed is the excessive love of money**—fuels the engines of contemporary Western life. Our national economy seems to depend on an expanding rate of consumption. Given human nature, it has bet on a sure thing. Raising our standard of living is as American as apple pie. The day’s leading economic indicators are listened to with bated breath.

Bigger, brighter and more expensive is the name of the game. We see materialism in every strata of society, often resulting in preposterous consumption in a desperately needy world. Advertisements convince us that we must have it all, and state lotteries promise us that we can have it all **now.** We have heard the seductive message: “You never know.”

While we claim our love of freedom, could it be that what we really lust for is not freedom but the power to satisfy our material wants? If we were living in a Communist country, for instance, would it really be political freedom that we would miss the most? Or would we find almost unbearable living in a tiny apartment, having to wait for many years to be able to afford a second-rate car or not having a variety of goods from which to choose?
From our cradles to our graves **our world coaxes us to acquire**. While the ancient Hebrews wrote the law on their gates and doorposts and wore it on their foreheads, we do the same, but ours is the law of supply and demand. Our athletes are not awarded laurels; they’re awarded commercial contracts to wear conspicuous brand-name labels.

Avarice in a society where everything is available, and often on sale, is a constant threat to all of us. Passing fads rather than lasting quality easily becomes our criteria for purchases.

We struggle with money because we want “more.” Maybe just a little more, but definitely **more**. And we are convinced, deep down where we make our choices, that if we had more, we would be happier and life would be better.

**Trivia**

We seem to spend more time and effort obtaining and maintaining our stuff than it ever saves us. We are finding out that **technology is a way of multiplying the unnecessary**. Mark Twain put it well:

“Civilization is a limitless multiplication of unnecessary necessities.”

**Insatiable Appetite**

The Russian writer Leo Tolstoy told a story about a peasant who was offered all the land he could walk around in one day. The man hurried to get around as much as possible, but his exertion was so great he collapsed and died just as he got back to where he had begun. He ended with nothing. And that is precisely what material desire produces—nothing. The more you feed it, the more it grows, until only the hunger itself remains.

1. John D. Rockefeller said, “I have made many millions, but they have brought me no happiness.”

2. John Astor left five million, but at the end of his life lamented, “I am the most miserable man on earth.”

3. W. H. Vanderbilt said, “The care of $200 million is too great a load for any brain or back to bear. It is enough to kill anyone. There is no pleasure in it.”

4. Henry Ford longed for the happier days of doing a mechanic’s job.

5. Andrew Carnegie commented, probably from personal experience, “Millionaires seldom smile.”
Some of us think we would like to try that sort of misery. At least wealth enables us to choose a more comfortable unhappiness. There is no doubt that wealth has advantages and that poverty in itself is not a virtue. But we are more than material. Therefore “man shall not live by bread alone” (Lk 4:4), and to focus on this one aspect of our humanity—the material—making it the controlling principle of life, leads into a cul-de-sac of unfulfilled desire.

Yet Christians are virtually indistinguishable from the society of which they are a part in the way they buy, spend and invest. They live just like pagans except they attend church and tithe their incomes, more or less.

The Dangers

Materialism is deadly to our souls for it commands our allegiance. Its danger lies in that it is a subtle obsession. While we may claim that material goods are low on our list of priorities, we spend an inordinate amount of time and effort on such things. This is why Paul calls greed “idolatry” (Col 3:5). Materialism is an impotent god which hides reality as it keeps us from realizing that bread alone keeps us very hungry. Exalted beyond its rightful place, it simply cannot deliver the goods of satisfaction and fulfillment.

Therefore materialism cripples our faith. Pursuing God is difficult enough without weights on our backs. It is easy to miss the “pearl of great price” if we are too busy collecting and polishing trinkets. And attitude is key. For a person can be free from a materialistic spirit even though he may have been blessed with a big house filled with many things while a person can be enslaved to the belongings of a small apartment.

WARNING SIGNALS

1. Becoming anxious about our money rather than managing it in a rational manner.

2. Comparing what others have with what we have. This means envy is creeping into my life (1 Pe 2:1).

3. Losing appreciation for what the Lord has already given me, when we begin to focus on what we don’t have.

4. Losing the joy of giving. Our souls shrink and we become “frugal,” a nice word for cheapskate or tightwad who calculate what we give so we possibly do not give too much. We end up focusing on keeping rather than giving, building our little financial empires rather than reducing them for someone else’s good.
THE APPEAL

Pride & Fear

The advertisers succeed because they have learned to appeal to our pride and our fear. Advertisers offer us a short cut to success. It is easier to buy than to become, to consume than to create. By having something admirable we immediately gain acceptance and respect. After all, we are what we wear or drive, etc.

Immaturity

The media also appeals to our immaturity. To be a new person all we need is a new brand of toothpaste, car, etc. And so we end up buying things we do not need to impress people we do not like. As someone put it:

“We buy things from one another we do not want, at prices we cannot afford, on terms we cannot meet, because of advertising we do not believe.”

Selfishness

The more we have, the more we think we need and want. We begin to think that our standard of living must rise higher and acquiring riches becomes an endless pursuit. We become like the rich fool in Luke 12:16-21, who said in effect, “Barns! I need bigger barns!”

Self-Sufficiency

Too much wealth tends to make God insignificant and the wealth becomes itself the great benefactor of mankind:

“. . . give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.
Otherwise, I may have too much and disown You and say, ‘Who is the Lord?’”

(Pr 29:8-9)

Insecurity

Advertisers also appeal to our insecurity. They preach the message that there is always something else we need. They play on our fears and insecurities. Banks have slogans like, “Everybody needs a penny for a rainy day.” Or is it a million, or millions? Save. Save. Save. And their words and music are so seductive that they stay with us. Things. Things. Things. Security once meant family, friends and faith; now it means ownership. “I’ve got an IRA.” We hide from our insignificance behind imposing piles of clutter. Inward beauty has been replaced by outward adornment. Being has been replaced with having.
What’s wrong with a little planning? Nothing—until it becomes a substitute for faith. What’s wrong with consumerism? Nothing—until it begins to consume us. Our security can become our prison. Consumerism traps us in the very anxiety we seek to escape.

In His Parable of the Rich Fool Jesus describes this attitude. The man who felt secure because his barns were full . . . until his soul was required. “This is how it will be,” Jesus said, “with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God” (Lk 12:21). Jesus warns us all:

“Someone in the crowd said to Him, ‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’

Jesus replied,

‘Man, who appointed Me a judge or an arbiter between them, ‘Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man’s life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions’” (vv. 13-15).

We cannot take anything with us, only what we become.

Then Jesus tells us a parable to illustrate greed. The Bible states:

“And He told them this parable: ‘The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

Then He said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.’

But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God?” (vv. 16-21).

Security

Greed motivates us to buy things just for the sake of having them. It gives us a deluded sense of security. As the rich fool put it:

“And I’ll say to myself, ‘You have plenty of good things laid up for many years’” (v. 19).
That very night, said Jesus, this rich man’s life would be snuffed out. After all, God only
gives us one day at a time.

Similarly James warned:

‘Now listen, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend
a year there, carry on business and make money.’ Why, you do not even know what
will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little
while and then vanishes. Instead, you ought to say, ‘If it is the Lord’s will, we
will live and do this or that.’ As it is, you boast and brag. All such boasting is evil.”
(Jas 4:13-16)

Then James ends with this statement:

“Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins” (v. 17).

James’ warning is not to go unheeded; to do so is to sin.

The Parable of the Soils shows us conditions of the heart that keep us from following
Jesus. One of those soils is the thorny soil of preoccupations in which “the worries of this life
and the deceitfulness of riches”—our preoccupations with material security and status—choke
the seed of God’s will. This means we have our own ideas of what is important and what is not.

Money and possessions are not to be our way to find security. It is utterly foolish since
life is so uncertain. Greed is the accumulation of things in an attempt to evade dependency on
God. God, not money and possessions, is to be our basis of security.

**Importance and Superiority**

Greed also gives us a false sense of importance and superiority. Somehow we think
that we are better than other people if we have more things than they do. In our materialistic
society, children get sucked into this delusion from their earlier days. At Christmastime, children
are taught that the better a person is, the more that person gets. Therefore, each child tries to
point out how many more things he received from Santa than were delivered to his friends.
APPLICATION

A Vicious Cycle

The problem is that we can never have enough since there is always someone out there with more. Greed can never be satisfied. Greed creates a vicious cycle because the more greedy we get, the more we want, and the more we want, the more discontented we are with what we have.

The key to resisting temptation is to be content with what God has given us.

Needs Met

The will of God is that each of us should have enough and then be willing to offer up our surplus to others in the name of God. We are not to enjoy abundance at the expense of others. There is to be consideration for all. Paul pointed out that we should give to others because “no one is to be hard pressed” (2 Co 8:13-15).

When Jesus was tempted by the devil after forty days of hunger (Lk 4:1-2) He did not fall for the devil’s temptation to turn stones into bread. This slight shift in priorities—placing secondary things before first things—was rejected outright. Although bread is a material provision, it is only that. And man was made for something more . . . the Bread of heaven.

DANGERS

Pride

With riches it is very easy to take credit where no credit is due and to feel in control of circumstances. For often with money comes power. We begin to feel that we are clever enough to plan our affairs properly. But as James 4:14 points out,

“. . . you do not even know what will happen tomorrow.”

CURES

1. Understand the Meaning of Stewardship

Stewardship in its true biblical meaning is foundational to unmasking materialism. The Bible is clear that all we are and own belongs to God:
“But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? **Everything comes from You**, and we have given You only **what comes from Your hand**” (1 Ch 29:14).

We are simply stewards who have been given the responsibility to look after the things God gives us. This means we do not really own these things. He does. We are to use them in a way that honors God.

Big mortgages, along with an acquisitive drive and consumer dreams deflect people from the pursuit of the Kingdom of God just as they deflect urgently needed dollars from Kingdom projects.

How much more could be accomplished for the Kingdom if God’s people released God’s money for ministry?

2. **Repent!**

Repent (change your mind and ways) before the Lord of your sinful materialism and ask for **His forgiveness** and **help to overcome** this strong seduction.

3. **Watch Out!**

Be alert to the seductive influence of television commercials, glossy magazine advertising and bragging neighbors!

We live in a society that pressures us with one-time offers, buy-now/pay-later plans, ten-day trial offers, one-day-only coupons, etc. We must slow down long enough to evaluate what we are being offered. Before we rush off to the shopping mall, we must ask ourselves, “Do I really need this?” “Can I get along without it?” “Is it really beneficial?”

**Recognize the huge difference between needs and wants.** God promised to provide for all our needs, not wants (Mt 6:11,25-34; Php 4:19). Choose what is essential and leave the rest.

By thinking creatively we may find alternatives to the acquisitive spirit our society instills in us.

4. **Practice Simplicity**

Simplicity leads to freedom from the tyranny of materialism.
As we look into the New Testament we find no specific injunction for Christian to live simply. In fact, very little is said of the economic lifestyle of Jesus or His disciples. It was apparently not a significant issue. However from the glimpses we do have, we can piece together a mosaic which reflects something of the way they lived. Simplicity was an integral part of their lifestyle.

**God’s concern is not primarily what we have, but what we have become.** A life of simplicity that focuses on being rather than having results in freedom, contentment and generosity.

George MacDonald wrote,

“To have what we want is riches; to do without is power.”

Extravagance contradicts a simple lifestyle. **Affluence tends to smother compassion.** Thus we have an obligation to reduce our affluence by sharing generously with those in need.

Simplicity leads to freedom which leads to power.

For those who make a lot of money this means they give away a lot. Otherwise they cannot live simply. To live simply does not mean to live frugally while the bank account gets bigger and bigger. Living frugally so we can save more is nothing more than just another form of materialism. To live simply means to live in such a way that we have more to give away.

**We are called to a simplicity that is an inward reality expressed in an outward lifestyle.**

**Dangers**

1. If **externals** become the measure of simple living, one easily becomes **judgmental** Towards others. Paul tells us not to boost ourselves by comparing ourselves with one another (Gal 6:4) and Jesus warns, “Do not judge or you too will be judged for the measure you use to judge others will be used by God in judging you” (Mt. 7:1-2).

2. Because God deals with us **individually**, we are frequently **learning different lessons**, at any particular time, from those we live among. If, through misguided enthusiasm, we press our own values and convictions on others, simply lifestyle can cause disruption of our relationships. This would work against the prayer of Jesus who prayed that “they may be one as we are one” (Jn 17:22).
3. It is possible to **miss the point** of the simple life by concentrating on external expressions. We might spend less money but end up with **much thought, even preoccupation, over the basics of life.** Jesus said, “Stop being anxious [perpetually uneasy] about your life” (Mt 6:25).

**Begin where you are, and take it one step at a time.** This may mean that you start by lowering your standards of living and find fulfillment in simplicity. Or, perhaps you find the Lord blessing you so much that you are able to significantly increase the use of your possessions to help others.

5. **Share**

**Sharing undermines a materialistic mindset and thus disarms the power of money.** Private ownership is the proud hallmark of United States. While it can be the foundation of free enterprise, it can also become an enslaving enterprise that binds our souls to the Almighty Dollar. Ownership is important to us because it gives us control. Yet that very control can leave others out. Private land and “No Trespassing” signs block our view of nature. But institutional sharing that provides public libraries, civic centers and museums allow everyone free access.

The grabbing mentality should be left to two and three-year-olds. How different from the first disciples who “had all things in common” (Ac 4:32,34-37).

Authenticity manifests itself in simplicity.

Jesus didn’t allow us the option of comfortable compromise:

“No one can serve **two masters.** Either he will **hate** the one and **love** the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. **You cannot serve both God and Money**” (Mt 6:24).

The reason for this is a simple one:

“For where your **treasure** is, there your **heart** will be also” (v. 21).

**Earthly goods are given to be used, not to be collected.** In the wilderness God gave Israel the manna every day, and they did not need to worry about food and drink. In fact, if they kept any of the manna over until the next day, it became ruined. In the same way, the disciple must receive his portion from God every day. If he stores it up as a permanent possession, he spoils not only the gift, but himself as well, for he sets his heart on his accumulated wealth, and makes it a barrier between himself and God. Where our treasure is, there is our trust, our security, our consolation and our God. **Hoarding is idolatry.**
Each of the three groups of people who asked the question, “What shall we do?” drew the same response from John:

“The man with two tunics should share with him who has none; and the one who has food, should do the same” (Lk 3:11).

To the tax collector,

“Don’t collect any more than you are required to . . .” (v. 13)

To the soldier he said,

“Don’t extort money . . . and be content with your pay” (v. 14).

Zacchaeus’ repentance was demonstrated in his sharing his possessions, giving half to the poor, and restoring fourfold to those he had defrauded. For Jesus, this was evidence of a changed heart and He could say to Zacchaeus, “Today salvation has come to this house” (19:9).

Repentance was to be demonstrated by a different attitude to possessions. Repentance and renunciation of sin will not be simply an inward experience. It demands a practical response, doing right, in a way that will inevitably affect our attitude to our material possession.

Generosity is vital for saving can become as much of an obsession as spending. What begins in prudence often ends up in bondage and slavery. Generosity will insure that we don’t trade one obsession for another. In a practical sense, generosity restricts our ability to spend on ourselves, but in God’s economy it does much more, for it is a double blessing—like the quality of mercy—money given away “blesses him who gives and him who receives.”

6. Be a Humble and Gracious Receiver

This means we must allow others the joy of giving to us lest we become proud, stingy receivers. Solomon put it:

“One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed” (Pr 11:24-25).

7. Be Content

Contentment is vital to a life of godliness:
“Godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that” (1 Ti 6:6).

Is being enamored by stuff evidence that we love the world? John said that the Christian must reject love for the world and the things of the world (1 Jn 2:12-17). He is concerned that his readers should not allow their attitudes to be anchored in the values of a society that does not know God.

Contentment is the secret of inward peace. It remembers the stark truth that we brought nothing into the world and we can take nothing out of it. Life is really then a pilgrimage from one moment of nakedness to another. Our battle cry is “Enough!” We’ve got enough.

When our lives become overgrown with things we begin to lose the wonder of the simple things of life such as pictures, paintings, flowers, sunsets, etc. But when our focus is Christ, “in whom all the fullness [of the Godhead] dwells bodily” (Col 1:19), things lose their attraction. Maintaining our walk with God deepens that contentment.

But there is no overnight contentment. The process of overcoming materialism will take more than just an overnight prayer, reading several verses about materialism, or hearing a solid teaching or convicting sermon on the subject. Paul says he

“. . . learned the secret of being content in any situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” (Php 4:12-15).

Paul learned to be content in the circumstances of life, rich or poor. And he learned how to do this in relationship with Him who strengthens.

Breaking

Breaking the strands of consumerism one strand at a time is wisest since we were snared by consumerism one strand at a time. If we become fanatical and get rid of everything at once, it probably won’t be long before we slowly get everything back again. For simplicity begins as a mindset and results in a lifestyle. Creativity will enable us to take advantage of space and things we never thought of before.

It is no coincident that the Me Generation is also the Cluttered Generation. Individualism and materialism are cousins. Studies show that Christians are reluctant to offer their homes for hospitality because they feel their home furnishings are too modest or inadequate. But if our focus is on fellowship, then the quality of furniture is not important.
THE PRINCIPLE OF THE KINGDOM

An anonymous saint said long ago:

“I desired all things that I might enjoy life; God gave me life that I might enjoy all things.”

This is the principle of the Kingdom of God. A generous, sharing spirit will unclutter our lives. A humble attitude that is willing to aim for simplicity will break the strands of consumerism one by one. A biblical understanding and acceptance of stewardship will lead to contentment since God is the source and focus of life.

While there are a few people that are so heavenly minded they are no earthly good, most of us are so earthly minded we are no heavenly good.

It is high time to outgrow our toys and grow our faith! It is time to live for that which outlasts time, to let go of the things of this earth and take a firm grasp of heavenly realities.

A simple life consists in having one goal. If our goal is to seek to please Jesus all the time, then much of the complexity and clutter of our lives will vanish.

If we are to indulge in life at its fullest, we must aim for the eternal. This means that we become rich in the wonders of His creation, rich in good deeds, rich in faith, rich in the marvels of His grace. Paul put it:

“Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life” (1 Ti 6:17-19).
CHAPTER 4
LUST
Matthew 5:27-3

“Give me chastity and continence, but not just now.”
–St. Augustine

The wife of a farmer asked her husband, “What did the preacher preach about?” He answered, “Sex.” Well, what did he say about it?” she asked. “He’s against it” he answered.

Maybe some preachers are against sex, but God isn’t. After all, it is God-given. He is, however, against the misuse, abuse, and perversion of sex.

A young priest who had recently graduated from seminary asked a bishop, “When will I be free from the struggle with lust?” The bishop answered, “Three days after you’re dead.”

Lust is a sin to which we can all relate.

Several years ago, former President Jimmy Carter stirred up a lot of conversation when he admitted in an interview to be published by Playboy Magazine that he was guilty of lust. The media picked this confession up and had a heyday with it. But is Jimmy Carter really much different from the rest of us, especially men? Maybe the main difference is that he knows himself better and is more honest about his struggles.

Few, if any, escape the indictment of lust. Sigmund Freud, the father of modern psychotherapy, shocked the Victorian world by declaring that sex was a preoccupation of all human beings. His comprehensive study of human nature and his analysis of human behavior led him to conclude that all of life is permeated with a craving for sexual gratification. While Freud may have overstated his case, he was closer to the truth than many of us would like to admit.

Sensuality is one of the biggest obstacle to discipleship, especially among men today, and increasingly among women.

In a study of a thousand pastors it was reported that

- 12% of the pastors had committed adultery while in the ministry—one out of eight.
- 23% had done something they considered sexually inappropriate.

When a thousand laymen were asked the same questions the figure nearly doubled, with
23% saying they had extramarital intercourse
45% indicated they had done something they themselves considered sexually inappropriate.

One in four Christian men are unfaithful, and nearly one half have behaved inappropriately.

No one escapes the indictment of sin! We are all guilty! For many of us it may come most powerfully in the area of sex whereas for others it may come more forcefully in the areas of jealousy, greed or power, etc.

The Bible describes the human heart, the natural man, in rather uncomplementary ways:

“For from within, out of men’s hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from inside and make a man ‘unclean’” (Mk 7:21-23).

“The acts of the sinful nature are obvious: sexual immorality, impurity and debauchery, idolatry and witchcraft; hatred, discord, jealousy, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions and envy; drunkenness, orgies, and the like.” (Gal 5:19-21)

Sexual immorality refers basically to unlawful sexual intercourse and probably includes illicit relationships of every description (1 Co 5:1; 6:13,18; 7:2; 2 Co 12:21; Eph. 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Th 4:3). Christianity came into a world where sexual immorality was not only condoned, but was regarded as essential to the ordinary working of life.

Impurity is a very comprehensive concept which includes not only uncleanness in deeds but also in words, thoughts, and desires of the heart (2 Co 12:21; Eph 4:19; 5:3; Col 3:5; 1 Th 2:3; 4:7). It is that which makes a person unfit to come before God, the soiling of life with things which separate us from Him.

Lewdness (Debauchery) is also described as indecency, licentiousness and lasciviousness are used also to describe a person who is unrestrained, who totally lacks self-control, and therefore gives free play to every impulse of his sinful nature (Mk 7:22; Ro 13:13; 2 Co 12:21; Eph 4:19; 1 Pe 4:3; 2 Pe 2:18; Jude 4). Such a person is so far gone in desire that he has no concern for what other people say or think.

Orgies refers to carousing and the original word meant a band of friends who accompanied a victor of the games after his victory as they danced and laughed and sang his praises. It also described the bands of the devotees of Bacchus, god of wine. It has come to mean unrestrained revelry, enjoyment that has degenerated into license.
Lust means turning a subject into an object: treating a human being as an object of sexual gratification. Persons of the opposite sex are always to be considered as fellow human beings and be treated with honor and respect. It is sexual gratification whereby we feed unhealthy sexual appetites. It is allowing our imagination to take flight as we imagine people, places, and things that stimulate our sinful human nature.

Filthy Language refers to sing words that are not honoring to God and often degrading to people (Col 3:8).

As a consequence of being fallen creatures, we have a natural tendency toward illicit sexual desire:

“For the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature. They are in conflict with each other, so that you do not do what you want” (Gal 5:17).

According to Paul, lust is a perversion of love. Jesus put it:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Do not commit adultery.’ but I tell you that anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:27-28).

Here we see that the boundaries of our sexual expressions are not only limited by the physical, but also by the mental—the lustful look and the playful imagination.

Jesus says that lust is adultery because adultery is the physical consummation of lust. Thus Jesus brings the issue of intent. As anger is the seed of murder, lust is the seed of adultery.

To emphasize the seriousness of this sin Jesus warns:

“If your right eye causes you to sin, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to go into hell” (vv. 27-30).

Lust is not to be taken lightly. It is the second of the deadly sins.
Definition

Lust is translated as “evil desires” or “sinful passions.” The Greek word *epithumia* comes from *epi* (upon) and *thumia* (sacrifice) and thus means literally “sacrifice upon.” The idea is that **something is sacrificed on the altar of our desire or passion.** Perhaps that something is integrity or spirituality.

The word lust originally meant “craving” or “any strong desire” (Mt 4:19; Rev 18:14) and was morally neutral. However the word took on negative connotations and became used almost exclusively in reference to inordinate sexual desire. By the time of Jesus this is how the word is used most of the time.

Lust is not noticing that a woman is sexually attractive. Lust is born

- When we turn a simple awareness into a **preoccupied fantasy.**
- It takes place when our normal observations become **abnormal preoccupations.**
- It is **inviting sexual thoughts and nurturing them.**

When Jesus warned against “lusting after a woman” He is not talking about the involuntary glance, but a **purposeful and repeated looking; looking to excite longing; using the eyes to awaken the imagination and then playing with the imagination.** Jesus condemns the act of using the eyes to stimulate the desires; finding delight in those things which waken the desire for the forbidden thing.

**Lust then is treating a subject as an object—a thing.** It is treating another human being as an **object of sexual gratification.**

Most of us have fantasized sexual experiences. The only difference between Don Juan and us is that he lived out his fantasies, while we usually do not, often because we lack opportunity or audacity rather than because we are spiritual. As someone has pointed out,

“It is depressing to realize that most of us are like the rest of us.”

The problem we have with lust is common to all who live this side of Eden.

Paul warns us about sexual immorality:

“When you do not know that your bodies are members of Christ Himself? Shall I then take the members of Christ and unite them with a prostitute? Never! Do you not know that he who unites himself with a prostitute is **one with her in body**? For it is said, ‘The two will become one flesh.’ But he who unites himself with the Lord is one with Him in Spirit.
**Flee** from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually **sins against his own body**. Do you not know that your **body is a temple of the Holy Spirit**, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were **bought at a price**. Therefore **honor God with your body**” (1 Co 6:15-20).

Paul’s main appeal, which he repeats twice within a few verses, is that we should know that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit. Therefore it should be inconceivable to unite that body, which is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, with another body which does not belong in our bodies. After all, we are not our own since Christ has bought us with His blood. The only appropriate response then is to “honor God with [our] body” (v. 20).

**Men & Women**

**Men and women relate to sex and love quite differently.** Men find it relatively easy to separate love and sex. Consequently, it is easy for them to have sexual affairs without much emotional involvement. Most women, however, have a strong tendency to link sex with love. When they have sexual affairs, they are usually more **emotionally committed** to their partners. This significant difference means that while the sex act is usually meaningful to the woman, the male partner has more interest in the **physical gratification**. It is no wonder that women are more likely than men to feel exploited because of lust. It also explains why women most fear **being used and then discarded** while men most fear **failure**.

**The Craving for Love**

Erich Fromm, a student of Freud, came to believe that the craving for love, not sex, is what permeates all of life. Love is what man is really seeking while too often settling for poor substitutes such as lust, power, status, greed, etc.

We all must realize that lust does not deliver what it promises. While we may gain a moment of sexual ecstasy, it is a brief moment that is followed by a sense of emptiness and shame.

By setting aside the desire for one’s own gratification, and seeking to bring joy and fulfillment into the lives of others we are provided the gratification that eludes those who seek it through lust.

Lust is an illusion, but love never fails (1 Co 13:7). Love can wait to give, lust can’t wait to get.

**Ultimate fulfillment in life is gained from loving rather than through the gratification of our sexual appetites.**
God’s intention for His people is sexual freedom. Such sexual freedom is not freedom from sex nor is it selfish indulgence; rather it is self-control. Paul put it:

“It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable, not in passionate lust like the heathen, who do not know God; and that in this matter no one should wrong his brother or take advantage of him. The Lord will punish men for all such sins, as we have already told you and warned you. For God did not call us to be impure, but to live a holy life. Therefore, he who rejects this instruction does not reject man but God, who gives you His Holy Spirit” (1 Th 4:3-8).

APPLICATION

1. Acknowledge that you are vulnerable. No one is immune:

“So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall! No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, He will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it” (1 Co 10:12-13).

“Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Pr 16:18).

Even though some people are more at risk than others, no one should feel safe.

2. Recognize the seriousness of immorality. It is sin that will not go unpunished. This is why Jesus said that it was better to lose a part of one’s body than to live a life of bondage to lust (Mt 5:27-30).

3. Be cautious. Don’t trust yourself by building fences at the edge of the cliff:

“Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched?” (Pr 6:27-28).

4. Have a list of nonnegotiables. Make sure you have a list and continually remind yourself of this list of nonnegotiables (marriage, family, calling, personal holiness, integrity, etc.).

One single immoral act can torpedo your walk with God and/or influence with people.
5. **The temptation to sin is gradual.** We don’t fall into sexual sin, we slide into it. The tree falls in the direction it has been leaning. Sexual sin smolders until it comes to full flame. Solomon put it:

   “Above all else, **guard your heart**, for it is the wellspring of life” (4:23).

You must be careful that you are not sowing seeds of immorality.

6. **Nip the temptation in the bud.** When we nurture or feed our weaknesses we give them power. We must starve them.

7. **Be as careful as possible with exposure.** If lust is a problem we must be especially careful about exposing ourselves to pictures, images, words that stimulate our weakness.

8. **When you face raw temptation, flee.** When it comes to temptation in general, there are times to fight and there are times to flee. In the case of sexual temptation, fleeing is usually the best route.

9. **The beginning of sin seems so harmless.** We need to be cautious about what we allow into our minds since Satan slowly, gradually, incrementally—almost imperceptively—increases the doses of sin or evil. Like the frog in the kettle, many of us become numb to sin and thus die morally and spiritually before we are even aware that the temperature of sin has been turned up merely by degrees until it is too late. We must be sensitive to the subtle suggestions and compromises of temptation.

10. Even as believers, **our capacity for deceitfulness and deception is limitless.** This is why Paul tells us several times in Scripture

   “to **test and see** if we are in the faith” (1 Th 5:17)

   The sexual area is the area most prone for self to protect and, therefore, deceive since it is so tied to our egos. Therefore, as we get involved sexually with another person we become as blind as bats morally and spiritually.

11. **We need healthy, biblical intimacy with others.** As believers, we must treat each other with utmost respect—as brothers and sisters in the Lord. We must not bury our social heads in the sand and forego all relationships with members of the opposite sex. This will impoverish our lives and keep us from dealing with our own sexuality. Rather, one of the best ways to keep from getting involved in unhealthy relationships is to have healthy ones.
12. **Sexual temptation is a most powerful force** in our lives even as we grow close spiritually to people of the opposite sex. This is true especially as we grow spiritually. There is a fine line between the spiritual and the physical as the psychological nudges us toward each other sexually when there is great spiritual intimacy. Paul warned,

“Don’t let sin establish its power over you!” (2 Co 6:2).

13. **Ask God for forgiveness** and then **ask Him to cleanse your thoughts**. Ultimately, the problem is not outward but inward. It is not the impurity in our society, but the impurity in our hearts that is causing the problem. As the Bible puts it, “**To the pure, all things are pure**, but to those who are corrupted and do not believe, nothing is pure. In fact, both their minds and consciences are corrupted” (Titus 1:15).

14. **If married, work on having a good marriage**. A good marriage relationship strengthens us and enables us to better fight against sexual temptations.

Women are especially vulnerable to lack of emotional needs whereas men tend to be more vulnerable to lack of physical needs (1 Co 7:3-5).

15. **Consciously make a covenant to sexual purity and holiness**. It is not enough for us to say, “I never meant for this to happen.” The question is, “Did you intend for it not to happen?” We must **honestly covenant not to be involved in immorality**.

16. **Commit yourself to be steeped in God’s Word** which is so crucial to moral purity. It was the primary weapon Jesus used when he was tempted.

17. **Pray specifically** about this area of sexual temptation. It is not enough to pray in general; we need to specifically, intelligently, pray to God to provide the help needed.

18. **Be content with what God has given you**. Paul put it:

> “**Godliness with contentment is great gain**. . . . People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction” (1 Ti 6:6,9).

19. **Become acquainted with the temptations that you must war against**. Look for attitudes and patterns of behavior that may set you up for a fall. Be as specific and thorough as possible.

20. **Discover sexual cues of your culture**. There are definite ethnic differences between cultures. It is vital to know what is appropriate and what is not for different ethnic people. Otherwise you may violate what is considered decent and proper or cold and unfriendly.
21. **Be as open and communicative as possible with your wife, if married, or a friend, if not.** One of the best protections against sexual temptations is to be able to speak honestly of them to a spouse. A spouses’ understanding goes a long way in providing the help needed to overcome such temptations.

22. **Develop a relationship of mutual accountability with a peer or mentor.** Be accountable to a person who will keep your feet to the fire. Whether married or not, it is crucial that you have an accountability person of the same gender for such people have insights that people of the opposite sex do not. Also, spouses are too close to the trees to see the forest. They are typically too subjective. They tend to be too easy or too harsh in their judgment of their spouse.
ENVY
Romans 1:28-31; 1 Peter 2:1; 2 Corinthians 12:20; James 3:13-4:2

“Envy is the consuming desire to have everybody else as unsuccessful as you are.”
–Frederick Buechner

“Too many Christians envy the sinners their pleasure and the saints their joy, because they don’t have either one.”
–Martin Luther

“The only person worth envying is the person who doesn’t envy.”
–Anonymous

Small children, angry with siblings or playmates, cry out, “It isn’t fair!” The idea of fairness comes earlier to them than the recognition of envy, and it is a good and right idea. Life should be fair and people should be fair. But neither is. Because of the fall of man, everything in this world is twisted. And we are left with unfairness. The Bible is clear: Only in the life hereafter will there be justice and fairness. In this life, we can only hope for some semblance of justice and fairness, but if we expect it, we will live out our lives disappointed.

The following illustrates the fact that all of us are not equal when it comes to ability.

1. Salieri & Mozart—Salieri was able to produce pleasant tunes, but not masterpieces like Mozart.

2. Cain & Abel—Cain did not offer a sacrifice that pleased God as Abel did (Gn 4:4-5).

3. Saul and David—Saul was not the war hero that David was.

4. Leah and Rachel—Leah was not beautiful like Rachel.

5. Joseph and his brothers—Joseph’s brothers were not as pleasing to their parents as Joseph was.

6. Herod and Jesus—Herod feared that this newborn baby boy would eventually take the throne from him.

God has provided talents and gifts that differ with each individual. The important issue is not what instrument we play in the orchestra of life, but that we play the instrument or instruments that God has gifted us with. That is our test in life and eternity.
MEANING

Envy is the fifth deadly sin. In English the word “envy” is related to the French word envie, which means desire. But in German the uncompromising penisneid means grudge. Both of these meanings are borne out by Webster.

According to Webster’s New Universal Unabridged Dictionary:

“Envy is a feeling of discontent or jealousy, usually with ill will, at seeing another’s superiority, advantages, or success. It is a desire for some advantage possessed by another.” (477).

Envy then has to do with one’s attitude concerning the possessions or attainments of others. To envy is to feel resentful, spiteful, and unhappy because someone else possesses, or has achieved, what one wishes oneself to possess, or to have achieved. To covet is to long jealously to possess what someone else possesses, whereas to begrudge is simply to be unwilling that another person should have the possessions, honors, or credit he deserves. As someone put it, “Most of us aren’t prepared to accept success—especially somebody else’s.”

Envy makes us petty and it makes us see ourselves as victims. It has a “poor me” mentality.

Envy is part and parcel of the innumerable sins of the pagan world. Paul lists them:

“Since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, He gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done. They have become filled with every kind of wickedness, evil, greed and depravity. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit and malice. They are gossips, slanderers, God-haters, insolent, arrogant and boastful; they invent ways of doing evil; they disobey parents; they are senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless” (Ro 1:28-31).

A NEW TESTAMENT PROBLEM

But slander is not exclusively a sin among the pagans, the wicked. It was a sin problem in many of the churches of in the early church. Peter warned his fellow Christians:

“Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind” (1 Pe 2:1).
There is a fable that Satan’s agents were failing in their various attempts to draw into sin a holy man who lived as a hermit in the desert of northern Africa. Every attempt had met with failure; so Satan, angered with the incompetence of his subordinates, became personally involved in the case. He said, “The reason you have failed is that your methods are too crude for one such as this. Watch this.” he then approached the holy man with great care and whispered softly in his ear, “Your brother has just been made bishop of Alexandria.” Instantly the holy man’s face showed that Satan had been successful: a great scowl formed over his mouth and his eyes tightened up.

“Envy,” said Satan “is often our best weapon against those who seek holiness.”

**Envy and Slander**

Peter associates envy with slander. **Envy may be the main cause of slander.** For slander is a way of bringing others down to size. As the philosopher and historian Will Durant put it, “To speak ill of others is a dishonest way of praising ourselves.”

Spicy gossip appeals to almost everyone. This is true especially if it involves some distinguished person. Will Rogers noted, “The only time people dislike gossip is when you gossip about them.”

In both Romans 1:28-31 and 2 Corinthians, slander is associated with gossip. The literal meaning of gossip is “whisperings.” It refers to the “confidential” nuggets of information whispered by little groups who meet in corners—information that destroys the reputation of those who are not there to defend themselves. Slander means any evil speaking, but it is often spread in the form of careless gossip.

Paul wrote to the Christians at Corinth:

“I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.”

(2 Co 12:20)

David spoke of poison-mouthed people whose words are as destructive as the venom of a poisonous snake. He said,

“They make their tongue as sharp as a serpent’s; the poison of vipers is on their lips” (Ps 140:3).
Earthly and Heavenly Wisdom

James warns us:

“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don’t they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don’t get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures.”

(Jas 3:13-4:2)

Earthly Wisdom

Earthly wisdom is unspiritual and of the devil (Jas 3:15). The word “envy” carries the meaning of selfish ambition and zeal. The opposite of a gentle spirit controlled by wisdom is a heart filled with “bitter envy and selfish ambition.” In Paul’s epistle to the Galatians, where he mentions among the fruit of the Spirit “gentleness and self-control” (Gal 5:23), he also mentions “selfish ambition . . . and envy” (Gal 5:20-21) as among the acts of the sinful nature.

As an experienced pastor, James knows that among the members of the church are some persons whose spirit is characterized by bitter envy and selfishness and he warns that if they continue to harbor envy and selfishness, they will be consumed.

James describes envy with the adjective “bitter.” he does not explain what caused this bitter envy. But he points out it is a transgression of the tenth commandment which warns, “You shall not covet.” Harboring bitter envy is sin. And being filled with selfish ambition goes contrary to the teaching of the royal law, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Jas 2:8).

“Do not boast about [your bitter envy and selfish ambition] or deny the truth.” People who are consumed by envy and selfishness usually talk about this to anyone who lends a listening ear. They ought to realize, however, that everything they say is contradicted by the truth. Every time they open their mouths to give vent to their feelings, they deceive themselves. When Paul admonishes the Ephesians not to grieve the Holy Spirit, he tells them to “get rid of all bitterness” (Eph 4:3). A heart that nurtures “bitter envy and selfish ambition” is devoid of heavenly wisdom.
If we deny the truth we live a lie that finds its origin with the father of the lie, the devil. James calls a spade a spade: “such wisdom . . . is . . . of the devil.” And as James points out, where there is envy and selfishness there is “disorder and every evil practice.” One thing leads to another. If there is envy, then there will be disorder and confusion.

Envy and selfish ambition leads to evil practices because egoistic motives overshadow and eventually eliminate love for God and one’s neighbor. When ambition becomes self-centered it degenerates into evil practices. Noting jealousy and quarreling among the Corinthians, Paul rebukes them for being worldly (1 Co 3:3). Instead, believers ought to be God’s fellow workers.

If we harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition we are not to boast about it or deny the truth, but to be honest and face up to it (Jas 3:14).

Envy and selfishness tie in with the first verse of chapter 3, where James warned believers not to be ambitious for spiritual offices. The wisdom of the world says, “Promote yourself. You’re as good as the other candidates, maybe better! The wheel that squeaks the loudest gets the grease.” Sad to say, there is a great deal of selfish, carnal promotion among God’s people. Even the first apostles argued over who was the greatest in the kingdom:

“At the time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, “Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven” (Mt 18:1).

Jesus took a child and used him as an example of what the kingdom is all about: humility-a recognition of total dependence (vv. 2-4).

James and John asked Jesus if they could sit on the right and the left side of His throne in heaven. When that didn’t work, their mother pleaded that Jesus might do them such a favor since they had been such good servant. Jesus answered their request with the question of whether they were ready to drink the cup of suffering. When they said, “Yes” Jesus made them the promise that they would drink from the cup of suffering (Mk 10:35-45).

It is easy to go on an ego trip under the guise of spiritual zeal. The Pharisees used their religious activities to promote the praise of people (Mt 6:1-18). We ought to be zealous in the things of the Lord, but we must be sure that our motives are right. The wisdom of this world exalts man and robs God of glory. In 1 Corinthians 1:17ff. Paul discussed the wisdom of God and the wisdom of this world, and he explained why God works as he does:

“. . . that no flesh should glory in His presence” (v. 29).
He then closes the section with the admonition,

“He who glories, let him glory in the Lord” (v. 31).

Is our zeal for the Lord spiritual or carnal? Do we rejoice when others succeed, or do we have secret envy and criticism? Do we feel burdened when others fail, or are we glad? When the wisdom of the world gets into the church, there is a great deal of fleshly promotion and human glorification. Beware!

**Heavenly Wisdom**

A good life is a life with deeds done in humility (3:13). **Humility** is the recognition of our **limitations** and therefore **dependence** upon God.

James continues by showing the contrast to envy:

“But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all **pure**; then **peace-loving**, **considerate**, **submissive**, **full of mercy** and **good fruit**, **impartial** and **sincere**.

Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness” (Jas 3:17-18).

**APPLICATION**

Peter said, “Therefore, **rid yourselves** of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy and slander of every kind” (1 Pe 2:1). The idea is “Be done with it once for all.” Take decisive action!

How?

The problem of envy is primarily a **heart problem**. It comes from a heart that does not rest in God. And when our hearts do not rest in God, we fail to realize that He is the source of all our needs.

There are at least four steps in finding victory over envy:

1) Admit, 2) Realize, 3) Find, 4) Pray.

**Admit**

The first step in ridding ourselves of envy and any other kind of evil is to **admit that we do struggle with it**. In some ways, this may be the most difficult step. Who wants to admit to such a thing? As someone put it,
“Confession is good for the soul, but murder on the ego.”

David prayed,

“. . . give me an undivided heart, that I may fear Your name” (Ps 86:11).

Such a prayer implies that David thought his heart was divided. Although David was in physical danger as he prayed this, what would be the benefit if God saved him from his enemies but abandoned him to his own waywardness? He not only prayed for safety from the enemy outside but also from his frailty within.

Denial will get us nowhere in finding healing for our souls. We must be willing to be honest enough to face our struggles.

Realize

The second step is to realize God is all we need, that He is the Source of all our needs, we are freed from having to bring others down to make ourselves feel more important.

We are important because we are important to God!

Find

The third step in ridding ourselves of envy is closely related to the previous step, that is, to find contentment in God. Contentment is opposite to envy. Whereas envy is never satisfied, contentment always is. Paul testified:

“I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through Him who gives me strength” (Php 4:11-13).

The richest person in the world is the one who is content!

Pray

The fourth step is to pray for tongue-control. The Bible says that what is in the heart eventually manifests itself by the tongue:

“For out of the overflow of the heart the mouth speaks” (Mt 12:34).
We have already found that the issues of the heart must be dealt with first. But we also need to make a concerted effort to address the importance of the tongue. While no human can tame the tongue, God can. David looked to prayer as a means of finding control of his tongue. He recognized his need of divine help when he said,

“Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips.”

(Ps 141:3)

Paul challenged believers at Ephesus to live as children of light:

“Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen” (Eph 4:29).

Mutual edification is Paul’s concern. Words must be weighed so they can help and encourage rather than discourage.

Before we speak we need to ask three important questions:

1) Is it truthful? 2) Is it needful? 3) Is it helpful?

Solomon advised,

“Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life” (Pr 4:23).

When we combine Solomon’s advice and David’s prayer, it reads:

“Above all else, help me to guard my heart. . .
Set a guard over my mouth,
O Lord; keep watch over the door of my and lips” (v. 23; Ps 141:3)
CHAPTER 6
GLUTTONY
Proverbs 23:21-23; 27:8

“I count him braver that overcomes his desires than him who conquers his enemies.”
   —Aristotle

“The same people who can deny others everything are famous for refusing themselves nothing.”
   —Leigh Hunt

Eating is one of the few pleasures left in life. As Pat Conroy put it,

“My mouth is a happy place.”

Food is an important part of a balanced diet.

Fewer words were never spoken:

“The way to a man’s heart is through his stomach.”

Joan Gussow, assistant professor of nutrition and education at Columbia University, made a point when she stated,

“As for butter versus margarine, I trust cows more than chemists.”

A DIFFICULT BATTLE

Mark Twain said about smoking:

“It’s easy to stop smoking. I’ve done it dozens of times.”

Those who are caught in the addiction to nicotine know how difficult it is to stop.

The same is true of addiction to food.

As Thomas Lamance pointed out,

“Many of us don’t know what poor losers we are until we try dieting.”

Alexander Woollcott spoke for most, if not all of us, when he complained,

“Everything I like is either illegal, immoral, or fattening.”
One fellow said, “My wife loves sweets. If she’d been Eve in the Garden of Eden, the snake would’ve had to use a chocolate cake instead of an apple to tempt her.”

Most of us can resist apples.

Desperation is a fellow shaving before stepping on the scales.

**GOD’S GOOD GIFT**

After God created the world and everything in it, He said, “And it was good.” **Food is a good gift from God.** Without it we all would perish. But food is not only important physically, it is also important psychologically and spiritually. It is not only a source of strength, but also of warmth. How often we have found that it was in the context of eating that families have bonded and strangers become befriended. Most of us prefer not to eat alone. Eating is an occasion to socialize, as a place of gratitude for God’s bounty. We know each other in the breaking of the bread. The Eucharist is the Last Supper of our Lord, which is a Family Meal, an occasion to remember, to reflect, to worship, to commit. To live without food, then, is not only to deprive the body of essential nourishment and proper pleasure—it is also to deprive the spirit of its need for relationship. The healing and strengthening body and spirit both happens best at meals prepared with care.

It is no coincidence that the major religions of the world all grant special significance to food and eating. Food is seen as the bridge that connects the material and spiritual worlds. There is no denying that we are shaped by what we eat—shaped not just physically, but psychologically and spiritually. Just as the body is dependent on food for physical survival, so also the spirit is dependent on the gathering of family and friends around the table at mealtime for spiritual vitality.

The correlation between diet and disposition, nutrition and neurosis, and health and happiness has led religious leaders to speak of food and eating with some frequency. Gandhi wrote of fasting not merely as a regimen to foster health, but also as a spiritual exercise of self-restraint and solidarity with the oppressed.

**A SERIOUS PROBLEM**

Like all God’s good gifts, this gift of food has also been misused and abused. **Obesity is now officially considered a disease.** In fact, it follows heart disease and cancer as a leading cause of death in our country.

Since 1960 we have grown an inch taller (from 5'8” to 5'9½” for men and from 5'3” to 5'4” for women) and 25 pounds heavier. Kids’ weight has increased about 9 pounds and teens’ weight has increased 12 to 16 pounds during this same time.¹
Studies tell us that 37% of men and 59% of women think they’re overweight. Women are closer to the truth. Men who are overweight are so by a larger margin than they estimate.

OUR BODIES ARE GOD’S TEMPLE

The Bible is clear that our bodies are members of Christ Himself:

“Do you not know that your bodies are members of Christ Himself?” (1 Co 6:15).

Another way of saying the same thing is that our bodies are God’s temple:

“Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price? Therefore honor God with your body” (vv. 19-20).

Since God resides in our bodies by His Spirit, we should value our bodies as a sacred place. Therefore by the Spirit’s presence and power we can be helped against sins which appeal to our bodily appetites such as sexual immorality, foreign substances such as drugs and cigarettes, the excessive use of alcohol or the excessive amount of food—all which is a misuse and abuse of our bodies. When we are engaged in such sins we are not only sinning against our souls, but also against our bodies.

Paul points to the dignity of our bodies by the fact that they are intended for the Lord:

“Food for the stomach and the stomach for food—but God will destroy them both. The body is not meant for sexual immorality, but for the Lord, and the Lord for the body” (v. 13).

Although granting that food and the stomach are transitory, Paul denies that what one does with his body is unimportant. This is particularly true of the use of sex, which the Lord has ordained in wedlock for the good of mankind (Heb 13:4).

As an illustration of God’s high regard for the body, Paul cites the resurrection of Christ’s body and, eventually, the believer’s body (1 Co 15:51-53; 1 Th 4:16-17):

“By His power God raised the Lord from the dead, and He will raise us also.”

(1 Co 6:14)

A body destined for resurrection should not be used for immorality or any other kind of misuse and abuse.
Paul told young Timothy, his son in the faith,

“Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers” (1 Ti 4:16).

It doesn’t say that we should watch others’ lives and doctrines. This points to the danger of judging others. For when we human beings judge others we judge by external standards. We lack the information and the discernment to accurately judge anyone.

For instance, people are overweight for various reasons such as glandular problems. Weight also has a lot to do with metabolism. Some people can eat like horses and never show it. Others put on pounds by just looking at food.

If we judge them by mere external measurements we may completely miss the truth and thus falsely judge and accuse such a person. It is difficult enough to struggle with being overweight, without having other people judge us.

Paul’s point to Timothy was that he would watch his own life and doctrine closely.

APPLICATION

In the matter of being overweight, it is vital that we find out if there are physiological or psychological reasons why we are overweight. If not, then we can go on to the spiritual dimension of self-control. It is naive to see the psychological and spiritual dimensions as clear lines of demarcation. Rather they are blurred as each one feeds into the other.

Self-Respect

If the problem is essentially one of gluttony, a lack of self-control then that must be tackled head-on. Self-control has been described as the least popular form of power. Yet Peter says:

“Make every effort to add to your faith . . . self-control” (2 Pe 1:5-6).

Many of us think of self-control as constricting our lifestyle with little if any liberty to do what we want to do. This assumes that self-control takes all the fun out of living.
The very opposite is true. **Self-control makes it possible to do what we, in our inner person, want, rather than simply being driven by the passions that accompany our humanity.** Freedom is not being able to do what we want, but having the power to do what we ought to do.

Self-respect is the beginning of self-control; self-contempt is the end of all morality. Often we let ourselves go when we feel we don’t deserve any better.

Peter tells us:

“Be self-controlled and alert!” (1 Pe 5:8)

Paul lists self-control as a fruit of the spirit (Gal 5:23) and it is a qualification of church leaders (1 Ti 3:2; Titus 2:6).

**The Importance of Discipline**

Mark Twain spoke for us all when he advised,

“The only way to keep your health is to eat what you don’t want, drink what you don’t like, and do what you’d rather not.”

By the way, if exercise is so good for you, why do athletes have to retire by age thirty-five?

And if swimming is so good for the figure, how do you account for the whale?

**Self-control requires discipline.**

1. Discipline is important in providing for ourselves and others (Pr 23:21). Without it we end up paupers.

2. Discipline along with truth, wisdom and understanding, is important because it is pleasing to parents (vv. 21-23). Every parent knows that unless a child learns discipline he or she will not achieve anything really important in life.

3. Discipline is important because the Christian life is a race and we must be as fit as possible if we are to run that race (1 Co 9:24-27). While it would not be a sin to be dressed in a suit and wear boots to run a race, it would be utterly foolish. We need to be stripped free as much as is presentable if we are to run the race as fast as we can.

To be fit has physical as well as mental, emotional and spiritual implications.
Leonard Louis Levine defined Americans as people who laugh at African witch doctors and spend a hundred million dollars on fake reducing systems.

We are rather strange human beings. As Andy Rooney points out,

“The biggest seller is cookbooks and the second is diet books—how not to eat what you’ve just learned how to cook.”

The question is: Do we eat to live, or live to eat?

Appetite grows by eating!

The five-word weight-loss formula is “Eat less and exercise more.” In reality, it is really, “Eat less and that less should be healthier food and exercise more.” As we have seen, the problem is not only the proportion of food, but also the kind of food we eat.

Because of the hectic pace of our lives we eat on the run—fast-food diets. Studies show also that men blame work—a grueling work schedule—for bad eating habits (49%). They point to fast food as another reason (40%) and the lack of tasty healthy food as the third reason (32%).

According to another survey by USA TODAY in 2004 when people eat out, fast food is by far the most popular way to eat (74%). Midscale dining followed (14%), and then casual (11%), and finally fine dining (1%).

STUMBLING BLOCKS

We are not to put a stumbling block in front of fellow Christians:

“But food does not bring us near to God; we are no worse if we do not eat, and no better if we do. Be careful, however, that the exercise of your freedom does not become a stumbling block to the weak. For if anyone with a weak conscience sees you who have this knowledge eating in an idol’s temple, won’t he be emboldened to eat what has been sacrificed to idols. So this weak brother, for whom Christ died, is destroyed by your knowledge. When you sin against your brothers in this way and wound their weak conscience, you sin against Christ. Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall” (1 Co 8:8-13).

Our Christian freedom is not given to us for our own sake but for the sake of others.

Paul says he will not be a slave to his body—bodily appetites. If we think we are self-controlled, we should try fasting and see how long we last.
Too often in our homes and church potlucks, we tempt those who are struggling with their diets with all kinds of sumptuous, fatty foods. We need to provide a healthy alternative.

APPLICATION

Weightwatchers have allied some of Alcoholic Anonymous’ principles in overcoming addiction to food.

1. **Admit that you are addicted to food** or that you are undisciplined in this area and that it is too intense to be controlled by your own willpower.

2. **Choose your environment carefully.** Paul said,

   “. . . *do not think about how to gratify the desires* of the sinful nature” (Ro 13:14).

   We should not subject ourselves to rich foods unnecessarily. If we play with fire, we will eventually get burned. We need to find certain stores or certain sections of stores where we are more likely to buy food that is healthy. We cannot go wrong if we eat more fruit and vegetables.

3. **Eat breakfast.** Nutritionists still claim breakfast is the most important meal of the day and the one that can invigorate us for the hours that follow. Studies also show that those who skip this meal are more likely to be overweight. The missed meal is typically made up for at lunch time or dinner time when the body is not as active and thus does not burn as much fat. Some grab a donut or other sweets to eat on the way.

4. **Volunteer in a soup kitchen or in a bread line to serve food.** The Jesuit priest Daniel Berrigan says that when we see the face of a person who is really starving witness when bread finally arrives that we might be willing “to lose a lot, or to suffer a lot–or die a little, even.”

5. **Eat a meal that represents the diet of someone living in poverty as an act of solidarity.** Our church in New York, along with several other churches and a synagogue did this for several years. We served half of the guests with a menu from the Third World and the other half a typical American dinner. And then we shared the experience.

6. **Recognize your need for support.** We are called upon to “bear one another’s burdens” (Gal 6:2). We must be there for each other.

7. **Counteract bad inclinations with something good.** The Bible expresses this principle as follows:

   “Do not be overcome by evil, but **overcome evil with good**” (Ro 12:21).
**Eat less and better foods.** In the past our grandparents and great-grandparents from the “Old Country” carefully prepared meals “from scratch.” These meals were filled with nutrients and sometimes too many calories as well. Today we tend to sacrifice that by eating prepackaged versions bolstered with artificial colors and sweeteners.

Although we have extended our life spans by conquering infectious diseases through scientific discoveries like antibiotics, immunizations, and improved sanitation, we have not improved our diets. Eating disorders flourish in our society. Not only is obesity now considered an illness, but *anorexia* and *bulimia* are a growing problem for others who choose destructive means to achieve weight loss.

According to nutritionist Jane Brody, more than 500 food products, most nutritionally deprived, appear annually for consumers to purchase. How can we keep up in discriminating between the good and the bad? Not without time and effort!

While it is true that many foods that are nutritious may not taste very good to us, we can, if we are willing to put some effort into it, find food that is relatively tasteful. Everything we consume in our mouths don’t have to taste terrific. It helps if it tastes decent.

Let’s get back to the weight-loss formula: “Eat less and that less should be healthier food and exercise more.” Not gaining pounds depends on daily details as well as attitudes. People who have lost weight and manage to keep it off limit their daily calories to about 1,800.

8. **Pray before eating.** Pray prayers that reflect your gratitude for God’s good gift of food. Pray for moderation. Pray for the people with which you share the meal. And pray for those less fortunate—that daily bread may be shared by all.

9. **Exercise more.** If we hope to lose weight and to keep it off, we need to walk about 4 miles a day, according to this recent study.

These findings are the latest look at the experiences of newer members of the National Weight Control Registry, a group of about 5,000 people who lost an average of 73 pounds and kept off at least 30 pounds for more than six years. This is impressive since over 95 percent of those who lost weight gain it all back, and in some cases, gain more than they lost. These results came from the North American Association for the Study of Obesity, conducted in collaboration with the American Diabetes Association.

**Calories by the Mile**

The following shows the number of calories burned by a 140 pound person doing these activities for 15 minutes:
The following sports show the number of calories burned when engaged for 30 minutes by a 200 pound person:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Calories Burned</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Cross-country skiing</td>
<td>181</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Running at 5 mph</td>
<td>134</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Walking at 4 mph</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Leisurely bicycling</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Fishing</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Shopping</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sitting</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Sleeping</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Running (6 mph)</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Stair climber</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Step aerobics</td>
<td>386</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Tennis (singles)</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Biking (outdoors)</td>
<td>364</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Swimming (laps)</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Rowing machine</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Stationary bike</td>
<td>318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Hiking (no pack)</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Jazzercise</td>
<td>273</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Golf (walking, carrying clubs)</td>
<td>205</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Walking (3.5 mph)</td>
<td>173</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Walking (2.5 mph)</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Weightlifting</td>
<td>136</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Yoga</td>
<td>114</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

All of the above have lower body benefits and all of the above except for the weightlifting and yoga also have cardio benefits.

10. **Get more sleep.** Sleeping helps us lose weight. That’s the message from a large study released recently. It confirms earlier research suggesting that sleep deprivation promotes weight gain.

1. People who sleep two to four hours a night are 73% more likely to be obese than normal sleepers.
2. Those who get five hours of sleep are 50% more likely to be obese.
3. Those who sleep six hours were 23% more likely to be obese.
4. Those who get 10 or more hours are 11% less likely to be obese.

Getting more sleep actually has a protective effect against obesity.
Paul says that *God should be glorified in everything that is done*:

“So, whether you eat or drink, or whatsoever you do, do everything for the glory of God” (1 Co 10:31).

The disciple of Jesus Christ is one who cannot afford to be mastered by any bodily appetites, but brings everything into subjection to the Spirit of God.
CHAPTER 7
LAZINESS (SLOTH)

“What good is a good head if the legs won’t carry it?”  
– Yiddish Proverb

“The lazier a man is, the more he plans to do tomorrow.”  
– Norwegian Proverb

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the Lord your God” (Ex 20:9).

“He who has been stealing must steal no longer, but must work, doing something useful with his own hands, that he may have something to share with those in need” (Eph 4:28).

A DEADLY SIN

Laziness or sloth is considered one of the “Seven Deadly Sins” by scholars during the Middle Ages. Sloth is an old word for laziness.

It may surprise us that this sin is at the top of the list. We tend to think of laziness as a weakness or a common human fault. While we may think of laziness as an undesirable trait and make jokes about it, few of us would list it as a major sin.

M. Scott Peck, a social scientist who has written some of the most popular books in the field of psychotherapy, says that laziness is a major cause of evil, a primary cause of psychological illness, and the main reason that Americans are increasingly failing at human relations.

He points out that laziness is what prevents us from being loving, and we all know that failure to be loving has horrendous consequences in our world. Love requires commitment and work, and those who are lazy are seldom willing to expend that kind of energy. For the lazy of the world, love is something that is just supposed to happen. Most popular songs make love seem like an accident, a spontaneous emotion which can be neither controlled nor created.

Laziness keeps couples from working at their marriage relationship. It keeps parents from nurturing and disciplining their children. It keeps children from honoring their parents by respecting and obeying them as they carry out their duties. It keeps students from studying hard. It keeps employees from doing their very best in the workplace. It keeps Christians from doing their fair share of service to Christ and His church. Why is it that 10% of Christians do 90% of God’s work? Why is it that 20% of Christians give 80% of the money to God’s work?
Sloth makes older Christians think they are to retire from God’s work as they retire from their work. Laziness makes older people sit back and enjoy while leaving it to younger generations to do the work. Such a philosophy of laziness is not found in the Bible. There is no retirement plan in Scripture. We get to retire when God takes us home, but even then, after a while of resting, we find that we will spend eternity worshiping and serving God.

Laziness is silence in the face of sin and evil. It is watching evils such as poverty, abortion, racism, gossip, etc. and not lifting a finger.

For instance, what would happen if Christians became serious and energetic in their fight against the evil of abortion, the silent holocaust? What would happen in the news media if millions marched on Washington D.C. to protest this slaughter of the innocent? Do we really think the media could ignore an event that would stop a city in its tracks by its sheer size?

The slothful person is too comfortable to get involved, too pure to get his hands dirty, too tired and sluggish to give of himself. Thus sloth is an excessive interest in oneself and less interest in other people.

The answer to sloth is responsiveness. Violence is not stopped by violence, but by nonviolent response to violence.

Sloth is preeminently a sin of omission . . . a sin of neglect . . . a failure to think, and feel, and speak, and do. Unlike the Good Samaritan, the slothful person, like the priest and Levite, does pass by on the other side (Lk 10:25-37).

GOD’S JUDGMENT

It is no wonder then that the Bible points to laziness as a serious sin. Part of God’s judgment of man was “painful toil” (Gn 3:17), that is, burdensome labor:

“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return” (v. 19).

Labor itself is not a result of God’s judgment since Adam was given the responsibility to “tend” the Garden of Eden:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it” (2:15).

This means that man is charged to govern the earth responsibly under God’s sovereignty.
Solomon points out:

“All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty” (Pr 14:23).

Hard work, not just work, brings a profit. Diligence then is required if we are to hope for success.

**IDLENESS**

Some believers at Thessalonica, probably because of idleness, were taking undue interest in other people’s affairs. And this is what often happens when we are not busy doing what we are supposed to be doing: work. This is why we have the saying,

“All work is the devil’s tool shop.”

While Christians in general took seriously the need to earn their own living, some of the Thessalonians, perhaps as a result of their belief in the imminent return of Christ (2 Th 3:11), were neglecting work and relying on others to support them. Therefore Paul gives the following admonitions:

“Make it your ambition to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business and to work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

(1 Th 4:11-12)

“And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle” (5:14).

Paul points out that these believers are to work for basically two reasons: reputation and independence. Even “outsiders,” that is non-Christians, do not respect lazy people. And as adults we are to be able to stand on our own two feet and not be dependent upon others for our livelihood.

**OBLIGATION**

Evidently Paul’s first admonition (4:11-12) was not enough. Apparently the situation had worsened and so Paul takes it seriously and gives more attention to it in this letter than to anything else but the second coming. In fact, Paul makes a very strong point . . . that a person who is unwilling to work should not be given food:

“In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our
example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: ‘If a man will not work, he shall not eat’” (2 Th 3:6-10).

As Robert Frost pointed out,

“The world is full of willing people, some willing to work, the rest willing to let them.”

Atlas News printed the caption:

“Some folks are like blisters, they don’t show up until the work is done.”

God shows no sympathy for people who are able to work but who refuse to do so. There is no place in the Christian life for laziness. And it is not to be tolerated. People who are able to work, but refuse to, are not to be helped. Helping in such a situation is being an enabler who encourages more laziness. The lazy people, like everyone else, are to be held accountable.

Scripture recognizes the fact that some people are poor because of laziness:

“Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth” (Pr 10:4).

“How long will you lie there, you sluggard? When will you get up from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest—and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.”

(Pr 6:10-11; these verses are also repeated in 24:3,33)

SLUGGARD

The word “sluggard” refers to a lazy individual who refuses to work and whose desires are not met (10:26; 13:4; 15:19; 19:24; 22:13; 24:30; 26:13-16). The sluggard’s love for sleep is also described in Proverbs 26:14).

“Do not love sleep or you will grow poor; stay awake and you will have food to spare” (20:13).

“He who works his land will have abundant food, but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment” (12:11).
“He who works his land will have abundant food, but the one who chases fantasies will have his fill of poverty” (28:19).

The phrase “chases fantasies” in Proverbs 28:19 probably means schemes for making easy money. Not everyone who seeks a job is looking for work and not everyone who wants a promotion is looking for more responsibility. Rather, they are looking for easy money.

DILIGENCE

“All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty” (14:23).

“The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.” (21:5)

“Laziness brings on deep sleep, and the shiftless man goes hungry” (19:15).

Thus Solomon instructs the lazy with the admonition to learn from nature in general and the ant in particular:

“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest” (6:6-8).

A little planning and diligence will go a long way in providing for basic necessities.

We see that many proverbs praise diligence and the profit it brings to provide for the necessities of life. They also condemn laziness as a cause of hunger and poverty.

We must be careful not to automatically equate the lazy with the poor and the rich with the diligent. People are rich or poor for various reasons. Some of the laziest people in the world are wealthy and some filthy rich. One of the differences between the rich and the poor is that many rich people can afford to be lazy whereas poor people cannot. There are many people who have inherited wealth with no credit to them other than the fact that they were born to parents with money. Others have abundance and can comfortably live off the interest on their investments.
In the Hebrew Scriptures we see that sin not only brought poverty to individuals, it also caused national poverty. During the theocracy, when God alone ruled over His people in Israel, He promised to bless their obedience with an abundance of fruitfulness in the field and the orchard, but also warned of the curse of barrenness for their disobedience (Lev 26; Dt 8,28; Isa 1:19 ff.; 5:8ff.).

APPLICATION

We are often humbled by God as He teaches us truth by using the examples of animals to teach us those lessons. To the lazy God says:

“Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise!” (Pr 6:6).

There is nothing lazy about ants. We can learn from them.

Spirituality doesn’t just happen. It is the result of responsiveness to the grace of God. Paul told young Timothy,

“... train yourself to be godly, for physical training is of some value, but godliness has value for all things, holding promise for both the present life and the life to come” (1 Ti 4:7-8).

Imitation

The writer of the Book of Hebrews wrote to Hebrew believers who were content with the ABC’s, the elementary teachings of their newfound faith, the Christian faith:

“We do not want you to become lazy, but to imitate those who through faith and patience inherit what has been promised? (Heb 6:12)

We must be responsive to God’s grace by imitating those who follow God, who have gone on with God in deeper understanding and obedience through faith and patience. Read chapter 11 and see the exploits of God by these people of faith.

Training

We must be responsive to God’s grace also by submitting to training—training in godliness. Have we been trained in godliness? Are we being trained in godliness? We must subject ourselves to God’s spiritual disciplines: Bible Study, Prayer, Meditation, Fasting, Worship, Fellowship, Witnessing, Service.
Accountability

We need to establish accountability relationships with others. We need to make commitments so that we can be held responsible. By committing ourselves we make it tougher to be irresponsible for we know that our feet are held to the fire by someone who cares.
NOTES
PREFACE


3  Psychomatica (Battle for the Soul) was a 5th century (A.D. 410) epic poem by Prudentius who believed that these virtues would help counteract temptation toward the Deadly Sins. This is cited in “7 Deadly Sins,” A Brief History of Sin http://deadlysins.com/sins/history.html (2/24/2012), Page 1 of 2.


6  Ibid., Page 2 of 2.

7  Ibid., Page 2 of 2.


CHAPTER 2


CHAPTER 5


CHAPTER 6

1  Center for Disease Control cited in USA TODAY (November 18, 2004), 1A.
2 Nancy Hellmich, “Average weight up 25 lbs. Since 1960,” USA TODAY (October 28, 2004), 3 A.
3 USA TODAY (January 28, 2003), 1A.
4 NPD Group, USA TODAY (March 11, 2004), 1A.
7 USA TODAY (November 17, 2004), 9D.
8 Healthstatus.com cited in USA TODAY (January 14, 2003).
10 USA TODAY (November 17, 2004), 9D.
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