

“THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS”

PRIDE

Today we begin a new series on the seven deadly sins. This is a series I’ve thought about doing for some time, and after finishing our series on Genesis 1-11, I felt a sense from the Lord that it’s time. It’s not terribly fashionable to preach on sin these days, and to preach on it for seven straight weeks sounds deadly in itself. But the more I studied and prayed about these topics, the more I realized what a huge presence these particular sins have in our everyday lives, and that bringing them out in the open and dealing with them straight on can free us to live the kind of life God has designed for us to live.

In the fourth century a small band of Christians grew increasingly distressed by the sin and corruption of the world, and decided as a group to move out to the desert to escape the negative influence of the city. What they found, however, is that the sin they thought they’d left behind them in the city went with them to the desert. One member of the group, named Evagrius, wrote down a list of temptations that he saw in his own life that seemed to repeat themselves more than others, and came up with eight. He asked others in the group to share their own list, and they were remarkably similar. In the sixth century the list was organized formally into what became known as the seven deadly sins – pride, envy, gluttony, anger, lust, greed and laziness.

These sins are labeled “deadly” because they are the source from which all other sins flow. Early church fathers spoke of these as being foundational sins – the kind of sins that go down deep, and manifest themselves several ways at a surface level. Someone labeled these the “Christians sins” – in that we comfort ourselves with the fact that we haven’t committed big sins like murder and theft and adultery – but we fail to see the quiet, hidden, internal sins wreak havoc in our lives – spiritually, emotionally, mentally, and even physically.

The goal of this series is not to rake ourselves over the coals and make us feel miserable about ourselves, but to free us from the besetting sins that drag us down and keep us from being all that God made us to be. It’s kind of when you don’t feel well – you know something is wrong – but you put off going to the doctor. When you finally do, he tells you that you have a tumor, and the only way to get rid of the tumor is to have it surgically removed. There’s nothing fun about getting an operation, but doing so will not only enhance the quality of your life, but save it. That’s what this series is about – we’re going to try and remove some deadly tumors that prevent us from reaching our full potential in Christ.

Romans 8:13 says, “For if you live according to the flesh, you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the misdeeds of the body, you will live.” God wants us to live and thrive and live abundantly – and that can’t happen if we continue to be ruled by sin. Hebrews 12:1b says, “Let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us.” We run freer and faster when we aren’t weighed down by sins that snare us and derail us.

Paul is very direct in Colossians 3:5 when he says, “Put to death whatever belongs to your earthly nature.” The King James uses the word “mortify.” We are not to tolerate sin or justify it or regulate it, we are to slay sin and eliminate it. Colossians 3:8 says we are to “Get rid of” or “put off” earthly sins, and the reason is because we have “put on the new self.” Whereas sin was a way of life before meeting Christ, we now are new creations with the power to oppose and overcome the sins that war against the soul.

What we find in each of these seven sins is that they are a distortion or twisting of something good – where a good, normal desire becomes evil. Gluttony begins as a normal, God-given desire to be filled, but becomes sinful when we fill our desires with the flesh. Lust begins as a normal, God-given desire for intimacy, but becomes sinful when we go outside of God’s order and design for how that desire is to be fulfilled. In the coming weeks we will learn the godly boundaries and limitations of desires so they do not turn sinful.

This morning we start with the sin of pride, and I want to talk about four things. Number one, what pride is; Number two, how to spot pride; Number three, the danger of pride; and four, what do about pride.

I looked pride up in the dictionary this week and was reminded that pride has both a positive and negative element. On the positive side, pride is defined as “the pleasure or satisfaction taken in achievement, possession, or association.” It’s not necessarily prideful to put a bumper sticker on your car declaring how proud you are that your child is student of the month, or taking pride in your work and doing a good job, or being proud of your country. Any of these things can lead to sinful pride, but this is not the kind of sinful pride the Bible talks about.

Pride, according to the Bible, is the undue confidence in and attention to yourself – to the skills you have, to your accomplishments, to your possessions, or your status. The Bible uses a variety of words for pride, such as arrogant, boastful, conceited, and high-minded. Closely linked to pride is the idea of self-absorption – life revolves around you – you are the center of the universe. I once saw a newspaper cartoon that showed a guy and a girl out on a date. They are all dressed up and eating dinner together at a fancy restaurant. In the cartoon the man says to the woman, “I’m tired of talking about me, you talk about me for a while.” That’s self-absorption.

The tricky thing about pride is that it’s easy to spot in other people, but not in ourselves. Pride, someone said, is like bad breath. You can smell it on others, but it takes someone else to tell you that you have bad breath. When we think about a prideful person, we usually think of someone like Muhammed Ali – who constantly bragged about being the greatest. Or we think of someone like Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who was walking on the roof of the royal palace of Babylon, and said, “Is not this the great Babylon I have built as the royal residence, by my mighty power and for the glory of my majesty?”

We look at guys like this and think, “I’m not a prideful person – I don’t brag, I don’t walk around with my chest puffed out, I kind of keep to myself.” But there’s a more subtle form of pride that looks humble, and quiet, and innocent. Like bad breath, it can be hard to detect, but it’s just as deadly. C.S. Lewis said pride is one vice of which no man in the world is free. All of us are prideful – it just manifests itself in different ways.

So how do we spot it? Some years ago, someone gave me a list of 75 characteristics of pride, and I have some copies of this in the foyer for you go grab after service. By the time you get through reading it, it leaves no doubt that pride is a much bigger issue in your life than you thought. Here’s just a few...

1. Being critical and finding fault in others. This is the habit, that we’re all guilty of to some degree, of judging others by their looks, their economic status, their intelligence, or their morals – and we see ourselves as superior to them. Rather than extending grace to people and seeking to understand why they might be the way they are, we judge them. This kind of pride runs rampant in the “cancel culture” of our day, where people sit behind their computer and attack and condemn anyone who does any wrong – even if that wrong happened 20 years ago. They become the judge and the jury.

2. Another sign of pride that has taken over culture today is being offended. This is sometimes called the “grievance industry” where a group of people feels slighted and or grieved by some perceived slight and take on the role of the victim. There are certainly victims, but it seems like everyone today is offended that they’re overlooked or treated unfairly. Instead of giving people the benefit of the doubt, offended people believe that others mean ill-will. Proverbs 19:11 says it is to one’s glory to overlook and offense. Being easily hurt and offended is a subtle sign of pride – when our pride is wounded, we lash out.
3. Talking much, but listening little. Prideful people love to talk about themselves. If you have a fish story, they have a better, bigger fish story. When you talk, you can tell they’re not listening. They’re just waiting to talk again, and often interrupt you in mid-sentence when they think of something. Prideful people are also bad listeners. One of the greatest gifts you can give someone is to take the focus off yourself, give them your attention, and listen. You will win friends and influence people.
4. A big sign of pride is unteachability. I remember on two different occasions people coming to my office who felt very passionate about a subject, and they each showed up with a large stack of books – one had at least a two-foot stack of books. The message was clear: I know all about this issue – I’ve read every book – and I’m the authority on this subject – I’m not here to learn – I’m here to pontificate. An unteachable person immediately becomes defensive if you try to correct them or offer constructive criticism. Humility says, “I have blind spots, and there’s always something new to learn.”
5. Thinking you are better than others – or the flip-side, resenting those who are better than you. Paul rebuked those in the Corinthian church who took pride in possessing the super-gifts of the Spirit such as speaking and tongues and gifts of healing, and looked down on those they deemed had less important gifts. That led him to write chapter 13 – the love chapter – reminding us that if we speak in the tongues of men and angels and move mountains, but have not love, we are nothing. Looking down on others who are not as gifted, or as educated, or as well-to-do financially is an affront to God because it assumes that we’ve got to where we are on our own abilities, intellect, or talent and not God. It’s just as prideful to think that you are inferior and resent those who are more gifted and blessed. This leads to the sin of envy which we will talk about next week.
6. Baiting people to give you a compliment or positive affirmation. This is common practice on social media – someone posts a picture of their new hair style, a vacation they took, or a pithy comment to attract attention and likes. I heard a term recently called “death by selfie,” where hundreds of people have died taking a selfie picture of them on the edge of cliff or a scenic location – all with the desire to impress people and they slip off the cliff and die. Pride can literally be a deadly sin.

All this shows that pride shows up in a wide variety of ways, and the first step to conquering pride is to be aware of it. Not only do we need to be aware of pride, we need to understand the danger it poses. Proverbs says, “Pride leads to destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall” (Proverbs 16:18).

To start with, pride is **damaging to our relationship with God**. In order to be saved and begin a relationship with God, we must humble ourselves and admit our need for a Savior. A prideful person will never come to faith in Christ because they can never come to the point where they see the depth of their sin and their need for a Savior.

In the Sermon on the Mount Jesus said, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matthew 5:3). The only way to have a relationship with God is to empty yourself of pride and trust in Christ alone.

You might remember the story of Naaman in 2 Kings 5. Naaman was a wealthy, powerful army general from Syria who possessed all the things the world says brings success and happiness. But Naaman also had leprosy and he hears there’s a prophet named Elisha who could help him be healed. So he pulls up to Elisha’s place in a fancy chariot with shiny armor, surrounded by his entourage. He knocks on the door, but Elisha doesn’t even greet him, but sends a servant to tell him to go down to the Jordan River and immerse himself seven times and your leprosy will be gone.

Naaman is outraged. “I’m not going to do that – I’m a famous general – I’m not going to dunk myself in a dirty river – just wave a wand over me or something.” The reason Elisha wants him to do this was to demonstrate humility. He would have to strip down and expose his leprosy for all to see, and he didn’t want to do that. One of his servants says, “What do you have to lose? Why don’t you give it a try?” So Naaman went back down to the river and took off his breastplate and helmet, exposing his leprosy. Once he did that, he dipped down seven times in the river and was healed.

Humility is not only marks the beginning of our salvation, but it’s a quality we are to practice throughout our Christian life. Colossians 3:12 exhorts us to “*put on humility.*” God can’t use a believer who is full of pride. The Apostle Paul had a lot to be proud about – his heritage, his intellect, his gifting – but he says in 2 Corinthians 12 that in order to not become conceited and puffed up in pride, he was given a thorn in the flesh – probably some physical difficulty – so that he would put his confidence in God and not himself. If we don’t deal with our own pride, God will see to it that it’s eliminated by giving us circumstances that drive us to drop our pride and depend on Him.

Pride also does **harm to ourselves**. When pride is not recognized and addressed, it becomes a fountainhead out of which the other deadly sins flow. When I’m proud, and consider myself the center of the universe, I naturally think I’m entitled to everything – and so I’m greedy. Then if I see somebody with something I don’t have, I will become envious. And if I can’t get that thing, then I get angry. But since getting angry doesn’t help all that much, I will look for some other kind of substitute in the form of pleasure, such as lust or gluttony. When I find myself unfulfilled, I get depressed, and fall into sloth. Every sin is ultimately fueled by the primary sin of pride.

Being prideful is an awful way to live, because we miss out on the abundant life promised in Christ. If we make ourselves the center of the universe, then we are constantly irritated when all the stars do not line up around us. A person might take pride in their appearance, but what do they do when their looks begin to fade? If someone takes pride in past accomplishments, and past glory, what do they do when someone else breaks their records and no one remembers them? If you take pride in your money or your good health or your position in the community, what happens when these things are suddenly taken away from you? You’re left empty.

Jesus taught something completely counterintuitive – that if you empty yourself of pride, you will be filled to overflowing. The more humble you are, the more happy you’ll be – the more content you’ll be – and more you’ll experience abundant life. Instead of finding your identity in things that don’t last, you find your identity in Christ, and giving your life in service to others.

Pride, not surprisingly, also does great **damage to our relationship with others**. People don't want to be around a prideful person – who is always talking about themselves, who is critical, who is easily offended, and who thinks they know everything. Relationships 101 says that if you want friends, if you want to be liked and admired – focus on others, be a good listener, treat others with grace, and give them the benefit of the doubt.

Pride leads to conflicts. James 4:1 says, “What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you?” In all of our relationships – in marriage, with siblings, with church or work relationships – we have desires to be liked, to be right, to be respected, to be affirmed – and when those desires are not met – we react – sometimes aggressively and sometimes passively. How many friendships can you think of that have been destroyed by pride? “Well, if he wants to patch things up, he can come to me.” And if pride is not dealt with, a root of bitterness can settle in your soul.

How then do we deal with pride? What do we do about it? I heard someone once say that pride is like shaving a beard – as soon as you shave, it begins to grow back. Pride is a sin we'll continually deal with until Jesus returns and totally transforms us into His image. But pride does not have to rule over us.

The key to eliminating pride is choosing to practice humility. Augustine, the great early church theologian, was asked what the three most important virtues were. He paused and said, “Humility, humility, and humility.” James 4:10 says, “Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up.” Humility begins when we come before the Lord and see ourselves for who we really are. One theologian said most of theology can be boiled down to two points: 1) There is a God, and 2) I am not Him. J. Vernon McGee had one of the all-time greatest quotes. He said, “This is God's universe and God does things His ways – you might have a better way, but this isn't your universe.”

Humility is recognizing that I am not the center of the universe, God is. Every day we have a choice of putting God on the throne of our lives, or putting ourselves on the throne. When the Lord's on the throne of our lives, He's in charge, He's the center of the universe, and everything we do or say orbits around Him. As Paul says in Galatians 2:20, “I no longer live, but Christ lives in me.” We adopt the attitude of John the Baptist who said, “He must increase, and I must decrease. He must become greater, and I must become less.” When I'm on the throne, there's chaos and conflict. There is no peace or contentment. But when Christ is on the throne, our happiness and contentment go up because our life revolves around God's order and design.

If I don't humble myself, God – because He loves and cares about me – will humble me. James 4:6 says, “God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” God's grace cannot flow up to a prideful person, it can only flow down to the humble. That's why anytime you see a person genuinely used of God, you see a person who has first been broken of their pride. A good example is Peter, who pridefully boasted that he would stand with the Lord to the end, and die for Him. Peter had a pride problem, and if his pride was not eradicated, God could never use him. But when the rooster crowed, and the Lord looked lovingly into his eyes, Peter's pride melted away – He was humbled – and once humbled, God was able to use him in mighty ways.

The greatest example of humility is our Lord Jesus. Paul says in Philippians 2... “Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus” (Philippians 2:3-5). Paul goes on to describe how Jesus left His exalted position in heaven, emptied Himself of glory, and became a servant made in human likeness. He humbled Himself and sacrificially gave His life on the cross.

We are to adopt the same mindset of humility as our Savior. We are to focus on and serve others. Humility is not thinking less of myself, but thinking about myself less. Marriages can be transformed simply by paying attention to your spouse – listening to them, understanding their needs, and meeting them. Group dynamics can change when time is taken to hear different views and letting go of the need to be right all the time.

Paul says, “Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.” A psychologist did a study in which he asked his subjects to list ten people they knew best and to label them as happy or not happy. Then they were to go through the list again and label each one as selfish or not selfish, using the following definition of selfishness: “A stable tendency to devote one’s time and resources to one’s own interests and welfare – an unwillingness to inconvenience one’s self for others.”

The results showed that all of the people labeled happy were also labeled unselfish. He wrote that those “whose activities are devoted to bringing themselves happiness ... are far less likely to be happy than those whose efforts are devoted to making others happy.”

This is why humility is such a valuable virtue. It not only pays-off in this life, but in the life to come. Philippians 2 goes on to say that after Jesus humbled Himself, God exalted Him to the highest place and gave Him the name that is above every name. In the same way, the Bible says that if we humble ourselves before God, He will lift us up in due time. Just as Jesus poured out His life in service to others, we are to pour out our lives in serving others. And just as Jesus ascended back to heaven in great glory, God’s Word promises that one day we will join our Lord in heaven and we too will receive glory. God will reward His humble servants with crowns and glory and responsibilities in the future kingdom. Our time on earth is short, and it is foolish to spend it being prideful and self-absorbed. Pride is destructive, but humility is powerful and appealing.

As we wrap this up, I encourage you to take some time this afternoon or sometime this week to sit alone with God and identify the areas of pride in your life. On your way out you can grab a copy of the 75 signs of pride, or you can look for it attached to today’s sermon on our webpage. Better yet, if you are humble enough, ask someone you trust and who loves you to help you in the blind spots you cannot see.

When the Holy Spirit brings areas of pride to the surface, then repent. Tell God how sorry you are putting yourself at the center of the universe, and putting yourself above Him and others. A huge key to overcoming pride is self-awareness. Pay attention through the week to how pride rises to the surface. Don’t beat yourself up, but rely on God’s power working in you to grow in humility, and each day to become more and more like Christ.