

## 7 SINS & 7 VIRTUES ~ Class #1, January 8, 2006 ~

### Why this class? – Our Purpose

What is it about you that makes you a Christian? As one clever soul put it, “If Christianity were a crime, is there enough evidence to convict you?” The scriptures tell us that there is a mysterious interplay between God wooing us to himself, at his initiation, and a free will response on our part that brings us together in actual spiritual relationship. What is strange about the wooing is that it involves a great deal of getting us to realize that we are deeply corrupted in our inmost character and in need of a total and profound forgiveness and personal transformation by God. How many lovers ever wooed you that way.... successfully?

Jesus is who made this reconciliation with God possible. And it is way more than just legal (that is moral) correctness (righteousness) that he wants from us, he wants us. He wants the enjoyment of our company and attention, of our affection and of our creativity and energy. He wants a real relationship.

Jesus said: “**whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.**” Jn 4:13  
and “**Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.**” Matt 11:28  
and “**I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.**” Jn 10:10

Also, “**If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free.**” Jn 8:31  
and “**Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.**” Matt 5:48

As for that last command to be perfect, we immediately want to explain it away. In fact we have hundreds of years of complex theology that has done exactly that – explain away the plain words of Christ. Jesus was not a naive idealist that didn’t have a grasp of the evil in the world and in the hearts of men and women, nor of the difficulty of living in such a world. He said, “**Things that cause people to sin are bound to come...**” Lk 17:1 and “**For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false testimony, slander.**” Matt 15:14 and “**In this world you will have trouble.** But then he said, “**But take heart! I have overcome the world.**” Jn 16:33

Most of us who call ourselves ‘Christians’ have a sincere desire to follow the teachings of Christ, but we have all run face first into the brick wall of sin and temptation within a very short time of setting our heart and mind to ‘perfect’ devotion. What is it about sin that keeps the most powerful being in the universe, God, and the most motivated people on the planet, those devoted to following his ways, from living in perfect corruption free relationship? What keeps us from attaining true virtue?

From Thomas à Kempis – *Imitation of Christ* pg. 1-2: “*He that followeth Me, walketh not in darkness, saith the Lord*’ (Jn. 8:12). These are the words of Christ, by which we are all admonished, how we ought to imitate His life and manners, if we would truly be enlightened, and delivered from all blindness of heart. Let therefore our chiefest endeavour be, to meditate upon the life of Jesus Christ.”

“The doctrine of Christ exceedeth all the doctrine of holy men; and he that hath the Spirit will find therein the hidden manna. But it falleth out that many who often hear the Gospel of Christ, feel little desire after it, because they have not the Spirit of Christ. But Whosoever will fully and with relish understand the words of Christ, must endeavour to conform his life wholly to the life of Christ. What doth it avail thee to discourse profoundly of the Trinity, if thou be void of humility, and art thereby displeasing to the Trinity? Surely, profound words do not make a man holy and just; but a virtuous life maketh him dear to God. I had rather feel contrition, than to know the definition thereof. If thou didst know the whole Bible by heart, and the sayings of all the philosophers, what would all that profit thee without the love of God, and without His grace?”

One of the great cries of the world against the Church (against all religion) is – HYPOCRITE!  
One of the great cries of Christians against others in the church is - HYPOCRITE!  
One of the great cries of Christ against many religious and political leaders was (and is) HYPOCRITE!

Have you ever felt like one yourself? This business of following Christ is serious stuff to those who really try to do it. We all quickly find out just how deep our attachment is to our favorite vices. Of course for us they are not really *vices*, per se, it’s just who we are. We were just born that way – right? Truly believing that sin is real; that it is a personal choice against the goodness and “rightness” of God is not just a problem for non-Christians, even Christian struggle with the concept in real every-day life.

Given the right circumstance or situation, we find ourselves like the young attorney wanting to justify his lifestyle before Christ by asking “*and who, exactly, is my neighbor?*” or like Pontius Pilate cynically retorting to Christ “*what is truth?*”

“That which we call sin in others, is experiment for us.”

**Ralph Waldo Emerson** (1803–82), U.S. essayist, poet, philosopher. *Essays*, “Experience” (Second Series, 1844).

“Sin has always been an ugly word, but it has been made so in a new sense over the last half-century. It has been made not only ugly but passé. People are no longer sinful, they are only immature or underprivileged or frightened or, more particularly, sick.”

**Phyllis McGinley** (1905–78), U.S. poet, author. *The Province of the Heart*, “In Defense of Sin” (1959)

The world’s answer, of course, is that we [Christians] should stop being so hung up about SIN. Hasn’t it been proven to be an old and cruel concept of how to control societies and individuals? New and informed thinking eschews such backwards concepts. Belief in sin is silly at best and abusively dangerous at worst. Virtue gets a better hearing, but even there, one is encouraged to be practical about the whole matter. If you have seen either, or both, of the current movies “*Syriana*” or “*Munich*,” you would have seen in epic cinematic

detail how “Virtue” is something we want others to have more of (the classical virtues, that is), while we reserve the right to define our own virtue as we go. We need to protect our vital [personal or national] interest at all cost. The choices are real, with real consequences.

I count religion but a childish toy,  
And hold there is no sin but ignorance [or, innocence].

**Christopher Marlowe** (1564–93), English dramatist, poet. Machiavel, in *The Jew of Malta*, “Prologue.”

A private sin is not so prejudicial in this world, as a public indecency.

**Miguel de Cervantes** (1547–1616), Spanish writer. Don Quixote, in *Don Quixote*, pt. 2, bk. 5, ch. 22 (1615; tr. by P. Motteux).

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After the first blush of sin comes its indifference.

**Henry David Thoreau** (1817–62), U.S. philosopher, author, naturalist. *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience* (1849).

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For God's sake, if you sin, take pleasure in it,  
And do it for the pleasure . . .

**Gerald Gould** (1885–1936), British poet. *Sonnet 21*, in *Collected Poems* (1929).

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Think about your concept of Sin and Virtue as it applies to difficulty you may have had, or are now having in any of the following: your marriage, a hostile neighbor or co-worker, a rebellious child, a personal addiction or offensive habit, your anger or depression at how people are so often oppressed in this world, at corporate corruption, at being lied to or deceived, at realizing that telling a lie or giving out “mis-information” could really help you out in a given situation.

So what is sin, and how many sins are there? And, what is virtue, and how many virtues are there? What are the seven deadly sins, and why are they singled out? Same w/ the virtues...

#### 7 DEADLY SINS

1. Pride    2. Envy    3. Anger    4. Laziness    5. Lust    6. Greed    7. Gluttony

#### 7 Contrary VIRTUES

1. Humility    2. Contentment    3. Gentleness    4. Diligence    5. Purity    6. Generosity    7. Moderation

What are other sins and virtues? (see attached list of examples)

## Definitions and History

**SIN** – interestingly there are seven primary Greek words for sin in the New Testament:

□ **ἁμαρτία** *hamartía* (□□ ' or □*a*□□*ā*'□ - in Hebrew) is the general NT term for sin. It connotes concrete wrong doing, a violation of God's law." In classical Greek culture the word was used to mean anything from "stupid" to official "law breaking," or offending against the moral norms of the "polis" (people). The Hebrew etymology draws out the meaning from a word one often used to say "he missed the target", or "he took a wrong road." The Hebrew terms strongly tie offending words, actions, and attitudes (sin can occur in all of those realms) to a break in relationship first with God, but then equally with others, and even a destructive disruption in ones own soul. The disciples, and then the fathers of the Church, revealed both in formal doctrine, and through narrative stories, that sin is both in individuals and in whole societies. It is a corruption of what God intended for good, and it is always harmful, even destructive to both individuals and societies, and even to the physical earth itself. Consequences of sin reach into spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and physical spheres. (Contrary to Moliere had to say: "It is the public scandal that offends; to sin in secret is no sin at all." **Molière** (1622–73), French dramatist. *Tartuffe*, in *Le Tartuffe*, act 4, sc. 5.

## History

It is part of our human nature to make lists; we've been doing it from the beginning of time. Scripture itself makes list of sins and virtues, but the 7 deadly sins are not listed as a specific group of sins in the Bible. That came later in the early centuries of the church. It is thought that the Greek monastic theologian Evagrius of Pontus, or St. Cyprian first drew up a list of eight offenses and wicked human passions. They were, in order of increasing seriousness: gluttony, lust, avarice, sadness, anger, acedia, vainglory, and pride. Evagrius saw the escalating severity as representing increasing fixation with the self, with pride as the most egregious of the sins. Acedia (from the Greek "akedia," or "not to care") denoted "spiritual sloth."

In the late 6th century, Pope Gregory the Great reduced the list to seven items, folding vainglory into pride, acedia into sadness, and adding envy. His ranking of the Sins' seriousness was based on the degree from which they offended against love. It was, from most serious to least: pride, envy, anger, sadness, avarice, gluttony, and lust. Later theologians, including St. Thomas Aquinas, would contradict the notion that the seriousness of the sins could be ranked in this way. The term "covetousness" or "greed" has historically been used interchangeably with "avarice" in accounts of the Deadly Sins. In the seventeenth century, the Church replaced the vague sin of "sadness" with sloth.

According to *The Picture Book of Devils, Demons and Witchcraft*, by Ernst and Johanna Lehner, each of the Sins was associated with a specific punishment in Hell.

<b>Sin</b>	<b>Punishment in Hell</b>	<b>Animal</b>	<b>Color</b>
<u>Pride</u>	broken on the wheel	Horse	Violet
<u>Envy</u>	put in freezing water	Dog	Green
<u>Anger</u>	dismembered alive	Bear	Red
<u>Sloth</u>	thrown in snake pits	Goat	Light Blue
<u>Greed</u>	put in cauldrons of boiling oil	Frog	Yellow
<u>Gluttony</u>	forced to eat rats, toads, and snakes	Pig	Orange
<u>Lust</u>	smothered in fire and brimstone	Cow	Blue

Throughout the centuries the Church has looked at the 7 deadlies not as a comprehensive list but as a tool to reflect on core passions and desires that pull us away from the love of God. There are other important lists that do the same thing, most originating in the Roman Catholic Church:

There are **sins of *Commission*** (those sins we willfully commit to violate a command of God), and **sins of *Omission*** (failure to do what is commanded; e.g., you didn't steal food from the grocery store (which would have been a sin of commission), but neither did you give food to the dying man that you were made aware of on your way to the bank last week.)

**Forms of premeditation:** Sins of: ignorance (called "material sin"), passion or infirmity, and malice (called "formal sin".)

**Regarding activity:** Sins of: thought, word, or deed (cordis, oris, operas).

**Degree of Gravity:** Mortal and Venial.

Mortal: A sin that is so heinous it deprives the soul of sanctifying grace and causes damnation.

Venial: An offense that is judged to be minor or committed without deliberate intent and thus does not estrange the soul from the grace of God.

**Capital Sins or Vices:** The seven deadly sins. According to St. Thomas (II-II:153:4) and St. Bonaventure (Brevil., III, ix) "a capital vice is that which has an exceedingly desirable end so that in his desire for it a man goes on to the commission of many sins all of which are said to originate in that vice as their chief source". It is not then the gravity of the vice in itself that makes it capital but rather the fact that it gives rise to many other sins.

**Scripture lists** abominations to God:

**Prov. 6:16-19** "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers."

More from the book of Proverbs:

- |   |                   |
|---|-------------------|
| 1. The evil-minded person   | Prov. 3:22; 11:20 |
| 2. A false balance  | Prov. 11:1        |
| 3. The sacrifices of the wicked                                     | Prov. 15:8; 21:27 |
| 4. The thoughts of the wicked                                       | Prov. 15:26       |
| 5. The justification of the wicked and the condemnation of the just | Prov. 17:15       |

**Rev. 21:8** “But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars—their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.”

### Gandhi's Seven Deadly Sins

Mohandas Karamachand Gandhi, one of the most influential figures in modern social and political activism, considered these traits to be the most spiritually perilous to humanity.

- Wealth without Work
- Pleasure without Conscience
- Science without Humanity
- Knowledge without Character
- Politics without Principle
- Commerce without Morality
- Worship without Sacrifice

*“There is one good: that is God. Everything else is good when it looks to Him and bad when it turns from Him. And the higher and mightier it is in the natural order, the more demoniac it will be if it rebels. It’s not out of bad mice or bad fleas you make demons, but out of bad archangels. The false religion of lust is baser than the false religion of obsessive mother-love or patriotism or art: but lust is less likely to be made into a religion.”* C.S. Lewis *The Great Divorce* pg. 98

**Bottom line:** God hates sin not because he is a bureaucrat who can’t stand his rules being broken, but because it separates him from those he loves, and they from him, and it introduces suffering into the universe.

Does anyone have anything to add to the question of what ‘sin’ is?

## VIRTUE

Virtue addresses the accusation of hypocrisy (mentioned earlier) in the very meaning of the word itself. It's historical definition arose out of Greek and Hebrew words meaning *without fault, without blemish, or free from accusation, guiltless, blameless: anénklētos* (or ἀμωμος. Heb. נָקִי [naqah]), combined with the meaning of moral excellence, something (a person or thing) that displays it's intrinsic value or worth, it's appropriate nature or use or function - *aretē* (Heb. אַיִל). St. Augustine defines virtue as “ordo amoris”, the ordinate condition of the affections in which every object is accorded that kind of and degree of love which is appropriate to it. (Kreeft – Virtue pg. 26 ~ Centuries of Meditations i, 12)

Plato developed the four **Cardinal virtues** as fundamental to the health of the soul:

\* Wisdom \* Courage \* Prudence \* Justice

The Apostle Paul lays out the three great **Theological virtues** in 1 Cor. 13:13

\* Faith \* Hope \* Love

(A combination of the Cardinal and Theological virtues is referred to as the **Heavenly virtues**.)

The **Seven Contrary virtues**: \* Humility \* Contentment \* Gentleness \* Diligence  
\* Purity \* Generosity \* Moderation

In addition the Roman Catholic Church developed **The Seven Corporal Works of Mercy**:

\* Feed the hungry \* Give drink to the thirsty \* Give shelter to strangers \* Clothe the naked \* Visit the sick \* Minister to prisoners \* Bury the dead.

The guiding verse for our study in the 7 deadly sins and the 7 life giving virtues is  
2 Peter 1:3-11

“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness (**virtue**).<sup>4</sup> Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires.

<sup>5</sup> For this very reason, make every effort to add to your faith goodness (**moral excellence/virtue**); and to goodness (**virtue**), knowledge;<sup>6</sup> and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness;<sup>7</sup> and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love.<sup>8</sup> For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.<sup>9</sup> But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins.

<sup>10</sup> Therefore, my brothers, be all the more eager to make your calling and election sure. For if you do these things, you will never fall,<sup>11</sup> and you will receive a rich welcome into the eternal kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.”

This class, therefore, is primarily about the deepest parts of what makes you YOU. It is a class about addressing the most foundational elements of your character (and mine) so that we may be effective and productive in our knowledge of Christ, and that we may simply enjoy the satisfying good company of fellowship with God.

A well known current philosopher and theologian recently said, “The most fundamental issue our civilization faces is: Are there any moral road maps?”<sup>1</sup> We will explore the moral road map of scripture and those footnotes added to it by the saints of the church throughout the ages.

**Any thoughts or comments?**

**PRAY**

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<sup>1</sup> Peter Kreeft. **Back to Virtue** pg. 11