



grow. pray. study.

January 22, 2023 A Byte from an Apple and the Seven Deadly Sins

Charity/Generosity and Temperance/Moderation vs. Greed and Gluttony

MONDAY 1.23.23 Luke 6:38, 12:13-21, Proverbs 23:19-21, Titus 2:11-14

This week's GPS offers brief overviews of the Christian virtues that can help us overcome the traditional "seven deadly sins." You can learn more from a historical article by Becky Little at <https://www.history.com/news/seven-deadly-sins-origins>. Chuck Griffin gave a specifically Methodist perspective in an essay at <https://methodist.life/tag/seven-deadly-sins/>.

Today we're combining a look at how generosity and moderation can guard us from greed and gluttony. How much do you need (not want)? [Ephesians 5:5](#) and [Colossians 3:5](#) called greed a type of "idolatry," of loving anything more than God. Gluttony is about consuming things (food, power, fun, even beauty or thinness!) in obsessive ways that make that desire life's center. Either can make our use of technology hurtful unless we link it with helping others and practicing moderation.

- Gluttony is, in some ways, a relatively "respectable" sin, one we often link to "good times" and "fun" more than any moral implications. In the short term, there's usually no practical way to share resources we consume to excess to help anyone else. What serious reasons are you aware of for limiting excessive consumption to gratify your own wishes (not just of food but of other resources, including tech)? Can you ask, "Do I need this?" without robbing life of all its fun?
- In the 1987 film *Wall Street*, Michael Douglas as Gordon Gekko said, "Greed is good." * Many tech advances have happened because the inventors wished to get rich, not to selflessly serve human needs. Yet a Neal Burton article said, "Our culture's emphasis on greed is such that people have become immune to satisfaction.... the object of desire is no longer satisfaction but desire itself." ** How can Jesus' teachings and example help you avoid the downsides of greed?

Prayer: Dear God, you selflessly gave your life for my sake. As I remember your generosity, bless me with a good appetite for you, and teach me how to live more generously in every part of my life. Amen.

* From <https://wwwquotemaster.org/Greed%20Is%20Good>.

** Neal Burton, M.D., "Is Greed Good?" at <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/hide-and-seek/201410/is-greed-good>.

Chastity/Restraint vs. Lust

TUESDAY 1.24.23 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8, Colossians 3:1-6, 9-10, 2 Peter 1:3-4, Hebrews 13:4

New Testament Christians lived in a world where lust and sex without commitment were a given. Yet Jesus taught that lust (desiring another person just as an object for our pleasure) is an inner issue (cf. [Matthew 5:27-28](#)). Hearts and minds act immorally before bodies ever do (and technology, of course, has magnified the chances to fall into that kind of thinking). That was why the apostles repeatedly urged Christians to resist temptations and live new, transformed lives (cf. [James 1:13-14](#)).

- Scholar N. T. Wright said a “world of unbridled self-gratification was what the Thessalonians found on their doorsteps, the world to which until recently they had themselves belonged.” * For people raised in the Greco-Roman culture, learning “how to control your own body in a pure and respectable way” was a new idea, not something they just assumed had any connection with serving God. In what ways is our culture different from that? In what ways is it similar?
- In Roman times, as in ours, many people saw sexual acts apart from committed love as “victimless” (even more if we see them on a screen). Jesus and the apostles said that sexually mistreating or taking advantage of anyone is to ignore God, who values and respects all God’s children. And the key is not “gritting your teeth.” We focus on things above, on the power God has promised all God’s children, to live above the world’s immorality. What helps you to do that?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you created us with, well, hormones. Yet you made us able to direct those potent feelings and urges in ways that serve love, not self-gratification. Whatever my stage or station in life, help me find that pathway. Amen.

* Wright, N.T. *Paul for Everyone: Galatians and Thessalonians* (The New Testament for Everyone). Westminster John Knox Press, p. 119. Kindle Edition.

Kindness vs. Envy

WEDNESDAY 1.25.23 Ephesians 4:20-22, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Psalm 73:2-9, 21-26

Envy is about wanting someone else’s “stuff,” or even the life they have. Thomas Aquinas reportedly said envy grieves any time a good thing happens to our neighbor. Psalm 73 said envy distorted reality (the wicked have no problems?—verses 4-5), and nearly led to spiritual ruin. Tech can magnify envy, with constant ads for the newest phone, earphones, or touchscreen (whether you’ll use the newest features or not). 1 Corinthians 13 said *agape* “isn’t jealous,” a searching spiritual challenge.

- Humorist H. L. Mencken reportedly said (an exact source is hard to find) something like “in America, contentment is making \$10 a month more than your brother-in-law.” In Psalm 73, it was “the prosperity of the wicked” that nearly destroyed faith in God. But envy can even strike when we look at other believers (see [Mark 10:35-41](#)). Whose prospects, possessions, or position do you envy? If you examine the thoughts behind the envy, are they accurate?
- 1 Corinthians 13 also said love doesn’t brag or seek its own advantage. Have you ever wished that other people would envy something about you or your life? Might a desire to produce envy in others ever tempt you to brag (maybe in an “aw, shucks” humble way)? [Psalm 23:1](#) in the King James Version said, “I shall not want.” Modern versions use phrases like, “I have all I need,” or “I lack nothing.” How often can you honestly say you feel that you have all you need?

Prayer: O God, thank you for valuing me, even when I struggle to value myself. Give me contentment in being the person you’ve made me to be, and in serving you and others with the gifts and talents I have. Then help me love my neighbor as I love myself. Amen.

Diligence vs. Sloth/Indifference

THURSDAY 1.26.23 Proverbs 6:6-11, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, 15:58

Hebrew wisdom writers saw ants work diligently. In Proverbs 6, they urged people to learn from the ants. The apostle Paul used Greek Olympic words and images in 1 Corinthians 9. (That made sense—Corinth hosted the popular Isthmian Games every two years.) It's good that technology can automate many repetitive, boring tasks. But that can lull us into an indifferent, low-energy approach to all of life. Our culture often seems to say that only days off and retirement are truly good times.

- Sports champions must avoid choices that harm their physical body's condition. Paul compared himself to a boxer in a ring, not a person “shadowboxing” against air. What forces, outer or inner, do you believe Paul saw himself needing to actively conquer for optimal spiritual health? What forces are you fighting for spiritual health in your life? How can technology help you to stay “in the ring,” actively building up God's kingdom, rather than becoming passive and indifferent?
- Hebrews 6 contrasted committed, active Christians with nominal Christians who produced no kingdom fruit. *The Message* rendered Hebrews 6:10-11 as, “God doesn't miss anything. He knows perfectly well all the love you've shown.... And now I want each of you to extend that same intensity toward a full-bodied hope, and keep at it till the finish. Don't drag your feet.” As Corinthians put it, do you know “that your labor isn't going to be for nothing in the Lord”?

Prayer: Dear Jesus, forgive me for times when I am indifferent to your presence in my life. Teach me to hear your voice more clearly, and then to have a gritty, engaged will to follow you. Amen.

Patience vs. Anger

FRIDAY 1.27.23 Genesis 4:1-10, Matthew 5:21-24, Ephesians 4:20-24, 26-27, 31-32

Genesis 4 was an archetypal tragedy. God warned Cain that his anger with his brother Abel and God had lethal risks. Cain ignored God, acted out his anger against his brother, and killed him. God said, sadly, “Your brother's blood is crying to me from the ground.” Jesus said clearly that contempt, anger, and even angry words that tear down and injure others are as morally vicious as the physical act of murder. Ephesians advised, “Don't let the sun set on your anger”—i.e., deal with anger promptly.

- Scholar William Barclay said Jesus first reproved “the anger over which a person broods and... will not allow to die;” then the Aramaic *raca* [idiot], which “describes a tone... the whole accent of contempt;” and finally the Greek *mōros* [fool]: “To call a man *mōros* was... to cast aspersions on his moral character; to take his name and reputation.” * Would Jesus respond similarly to the angry words we see hurled on social media (and maybe join in) today?
- Does Cain's “am I my brother's guardian?” ever match the way you are inclined to deal with the results of your anger? Ephesians 4 knew that “anger is natural... because people hurt each other in various ways.... Paul wants them to deal with it right away so that no one sins against another by feeding on that anger and doing further damage.” ** Before hitting “send” on angry words, are you willing to ask, “Does this give grace? Does it build up? Can I picture Jesus saying this?”

Prayer: Dear Jesus, when you lived here, evil made you angry—pious people who misrepresented God and hurt innocent people. Help me be angry about the things that make you angry. But help me, also, to live with your patience and mercy. Amen.

* William Barclay, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Matthew—Volume 1, Chapters 1–10* (Revised Edition).

Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1976, pp. 139-140.

** Timothy Gombis, study note on Ephesians 4:26 in *The CEB Study Bible*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2013, p. 369 NT.

Humility vs. Pride

SATURDAY 1.28.23 Proverbs 16:18-19, Ephesians 4:6-10, James 3:13-18

In the sixth century, St. Gregory the Great (later Pope Gregory I), who first named the seven deadly sins in the form we're familiar with, called pride "the ruler of the other seven vices." Seven centuries later, St. Thomas Aquinas similarly called "pride" the overarching ruler of the seven sins. * When James described humility as missing, we find many of the deadly behaviors we studied earlier this week cropping up. Conversely, translators have often rendered the Greek word behind "humble lifestyle" (*prautes*) as "meekness." It is "the opposite of arrogance. It is often understood as self-effacement or submissiveness and is therefore considered by many as a weakness rather than a virtue. In Jesus' teaching, however, it is a desirable quality.... this sort of 'humility' can come only from true wisdom—the wisdom from God!" ** When used humbly, with a deep desire to live out God's wisdom, technology can become a genuine instrument for good and productive living.

- Do you agree with the sages of Proverbs—would living humbly with the needy be better than "living high" with the proud? Why or why not? The apostle Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, called all Christ-followers together "one body and one spirit." But pride inevitably puts us above others, better than others. It is natural for us to tend to believe what we're involved in is the "most important," and that the tools and methods we use are "the best." That's why God's wisdom points us toward the power of humility, of valuing one another and not just ourselves. How can God-given wisdom and love turn "win/lose" conflicts toward the promise of "win/win" outcomes? What must happen in us so that we see stronger relationships as a bigger "win" than always getting our way? How can you act with confidence (in a church ministry, your work, your family, or just your own life) out of humility rather than pride?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you've called me to join with others in carrying out your mission in the world. I commit myself to use the gifts you've given me in humble harmony with other members of your body for your purposes. Amen.

* From an article by Becky Little at <https://www.history.com/news/seven-deadly-sins-origins>.

** I-Jin Loh and Howard A. Hatton, *A Handbook on the Letter from James*. New York: United Bible Societies, 1997, p. 122.

