

**THE SIN OF ENVY**  
**Second in a Sermon Series on the Seven Deadly Sins**  
**Peace in Christ Lutheran Church**  
**Walkersville, Maryland**  
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**Proverbs 3:27-35 & 23:7**

As I shared in my introduction to this series last week, the Seven Deadly Sins are neither in conflict nor competition with violations against the Ten Commandments, but are another way of expressing the same deadly problem(s). Sin is brokenness of the relationships with God, our neighbors, and within self. Sins as actions, both of commission of wrong and omission of right, fill the abyss.

Pride, the first and most basic of the classic deadly sins, is thinking of self either more highly or more often than I ought to think. Both are self-centered; both are idolatrous. Pride most often leads to haughty or arrogant behavior towards others in the case of thinking more highly and tends to exhaust others in the event of thinking more often, especially when things are hard for us.

All sin, no matter how defined or expressed, is social. It will always have an impact, if subtle, on others, and if not immediately, then in time. With the sin of envy, we enter the obviously social. Deadly sins all have a social impact, but envy requires a social object.

Envy can and often does direct itself **to things** in another's life that one wants for oneself in the first place, and wants the other not to have in the second place. I do not just want the bright new red BMW like my neighbor's, but also do not like him having it. It goes right back to Genesis 4 and the Cain and Abel rivalry. Having God's favor like Abel would not have been enough for Cain, and Abel, his own brother, had to go.

In reality, however, the envy there, like most envy, is not just a matter of material: the Corvette in the driveway, the driveway leading up to the especially nice home, or the Gucci shoes Mrs. Fancy wears and purse she displays. What more often is envied is the quality of person, the human gifts necessary to acquire, earn, or otherwise obtain those things. Still more enviable than the goods or the smarts to get them is the reputation of the other and the character it takes to earn that reputation. Most of us do not envy gangsters and others who steal and cheat. Most of us would avoid selling drugs or promoting pornography just to get rich.

The Hebrew Scriptures warn against the envy of: the **"violent"** (Proverbs 3:31); **"sinners"** (23:17); the **"wicked"** (24:1) Solomon (Ecclesiastes 4:4) wrote: ***"Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work came from one person's envy of another. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind."***

The Christian Scriptures tend to treat envy as one on a list of nasty things: “. . . *adultery, avarice, wickedness, deceit, licentiousness, ENVY, slander, pride, folly. . .*” (Mark 7:22) The Apostle James in his letter (3:14) wrote: “*But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth.*”

We get some hints both in what Solomon wrote about work and toil coming from envy and James' connection with selfish ambition. In a human sense, that is, a worldly sense, whether in a generally prosperous culture like our own or some significantly more primitive and “poorer” (how poor is defined and described varies) culture, goods or products of labor are a primary sign of success and worth. Whether it is beads or Buicks, goats or Gucci, matters not. What does matter is what the goods represent in the culture and what skills it takes to earn, create, or otherwise obtain them.

In some cultures, especially former ones, like that of the Native American, the physical strength to defeat an enemy, and the scalp taken to prove it, often produces envy in other members of the tribe. The next thing you know competition results in the taking, collecting and displaying of scalps. It should be pointed out that the taking of scalps was a white man's practice before natives adopted it.

What about us? Our productivity, physical or intellectual skills? To repeat what I shared earlier in effect, people who envy may care less about the car, the drive up to the house and more about the drive it took to have it all. Envy of another—and there must be another—always damages the relationship with that other in some fashion or in due time. But watch! It also always damages in some way a person's capacity to be productive with one's own gifts and talents. Envy keeps me from being me. Envy keeps God from being God to me. There again is the idolatry.

Interestingly, we seldom envy another's generosity, compassion, contributiveness to community wholeness or justice. We might envy the reputation but not what it took to gain it. If we opted to replicate commitment in another in order to become more generous or helpful, then it would be other than and more righteous than envy.

In summary: 1) envy damages my and my relationships with others and God who endowed me with gifts; 2) despite cultural values, I am not what I have (things are never the point; just ask those who have many things); 3) I NEED TO CONFESS MY PENCHANT FOR ENVY AND KNOW ANEW THAT GOD IN CHRIST LOVES AND FORGIVES ME; 4) I can be more useful to others and God if I happily and thankfully use the gifts I have to be who God made me to be; 5) will I allow myself to be spiritually stretched and learn to be thankful for the gifts others have?

Pride never satisfies. It will require and produce envy. We had better not give in to envy or we might become angry, very angry. Anger is next week's deadly sin!