

THE SIN OF PRIDE
First in a Sermon Series on the Seven Deadly Sins
Peace in Christ Lutheran Church
Walkersville, Maryland
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“The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil. Pride and arrogance and the way of evil and perverted speech I hate.” (Proverbs 8:13) “When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with the humble is wisdom.” (Proverbs 11:2)

During the six or so weeks I have been with you, on Sundays I preach from an outline. My formerly Baptist wife insists that I am more spontaneous in that way. When I have a sermon series, however, I write out my messages in order that they may be re-read by those who hear or read for the first time by those who do not. I have been told over the years that these messages are clearer, cleaner, crisper, but less lively. I am warning you in advance that I believe this sort of series is good for you but may be a bit more work.

Karl Mennenger, founder of the clinic that bears his name, wrote a book entitled “Whatever Became of Sin?” in the early 1970s. In it, he wondered about our culture’s movement from “sin” as a word to more palatable words like: “mistakes,” “behavioral problems,” “character flaws.” Sin had become an outmoded way of speaking about human imperfections.

Also in relatively recent times, we have spoken anew of sin as “condition” as well as “bad” or “immoral behavior.” A marriage that is failing is sinful because it is broken and marriages are supposed to be in tact if imperfect. Clearly, within a broken marriage there are all sorts of sins (bad behavior) on both sides which made for the brokenness.

In a Christian view, the relationship between God and human beings is broken, that being the responsibility of humans and not God. God bridges that brokenness with the righteousness and loving sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Lent, as a season, affords us the opportunity to re-focus both on our sin and Christ’s lack of it, as well as Christ’s intimate relationship with His Heavenly Father and the healing of our relationship with our Heavenly Father.

To speak of deadly sins, seven or any other number, is necessary overstatement, for, indeed, all sins are deadly, in that sin destroys the sinner, harms or even kills the object of the sin, and demolishes the relationship with the Divine. That is as deadly as it gets.

To speak of deadly sins is not in conflict with sins of commission of wrong or omission of right according to the Ten Commandments, but is simply another way of looking at the same problem. While there is no "feed the hungry" commandment, doing so is loving God with the whole self and neighbor as self. Not to share bread, and all that is included in a Biblical understanding thereof, is deadly. The sins we shall re-visit share deadliness with violations against the Ten Commandments. I trust that we shall see how the deadly sins weave in and out of the Commandments and are not in conflict with them.

The first and most basic as well as most deadly sin is that of pride. Please carefully grasp that there is a positive sense of pride. To have a sense of dignity, appropriate worth and self-respect, is not wrong. To be generally grateful, especially to God, about who one is and what one has and the family and friends one shares, is as it ought to be. But to have an inflated or exaggerated sense of oneself or one's importance or to behave and act arrogantly or haughty is to invite the Lord's disgust, and, most likely, that of most others.

This also pertains to nations, perhaps especially our own at this juncture in history. I am proud of my American heritage and thank God for it every day. As a nation, however, we too must watch out for haughtiness and arrogance, especially with the military and economic might we wield the world over. America is no more or no less important to God than is Iraq or Iran, Mexico or Monaco, France or Finland. Our political leaders are no more important to God than are the leaders of all other nations. That is not the way things go on political fronts around the world but it is the way of God. The bumper sticker we could and perhaps should display is: "God bless all the nations on earth; no exceptions."

Back to the more personal issues here, God does not want me thinking more highly of myself than I ought to think (Romans 12:3), but God does not want me beating up on myself either. God loves me. Pride, however, can also be thinking of myself more often than I ought to think.

Oh the whining that can go on when things go badly for a person. "Poor me!" "Oh how awful life is!" "I wish I were dead!" These are expressions of pain that are often accurate and even appropriate given certain circumstances. GOD DOES NOT WANT US TO IGNORE PAIN, TO AVOID GRIEVING LOSS, OR TO IGNORE ILLNESS AS IF WE COULD REALLY HIDE SUCH THINGS ANYWAY.

But the minute we become, in our own eyes, or seek to be in the eyes of others, the pivot around which the world turns, pride, in kits negative sense has set in. A PERSON CAN SUCK A FAMILY DRY; KEEP ANY HUMAN SYSTEM, INCLUDING A CHRISTIAN CHURCH, IN AN UPROAR; AND WITH INCREDIBLE EFFICIENCY, KEEP ATTENTION FOCUCES ON SELF. THAT'S THE SIN!

Pride, either as thinking too highly of or too often on self, is basic to all other deadly sins, in the very same way the first commandment (idolatry) is basic to the other nine. ALL DEADLY SINS FIND THEIR FOUNDATION IN AN IMBALANCED VIEW OF SELF THAT NOT ONLY VERGES ON IDOLOTRY BUT IS IDOLOTRY.

In pain or in pleasure or in between, I am never the center of anything; God is! The summation of the Ten Commandments is NOT: "Love me with all your heart, soul, strength, and mind, my neighbor if you have time; and God, just in case there is any energy left."

As I end this introduction and first deadly sin, we are invited to keep the sequence straight, just as is the case with the Ten Commandments. The balanced way is: God first and then neighbor as self.

We fail at keeping that straight and are invited each day, especially during Lent, to confess our sin and to profess God who in Christ loves us with all His heart, soul, strength and mind, so that we might be right with God and each other. I am neither better nor worse than you, but just like you in our common need for love and forgiving grace. Just think, Jesus died to reconcile the whole world to himself (2 Corinthians 5:19) and desires to be at the center of the world and us because of it!