

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

**GOD'S WONDERFUL WAY OF LIFE
COMPILATION
BOOK 3**

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THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

INTRODUCTION

Pride, envy, anger, greed, sloth, lust and gluttony. This list, known as the seven deadly sins, has been categorized together since the Middle Ages as a means of helping people examine their behaviour before God.

Though the Bible does not group all of these sins together in one specific place within its pages, the Bible does speak extensively about them. They are indeed seven of the most prevalent sins that plague humanity and here we'll describe what they are, why we have such a hard time with them and showing biblical answers as to how to overcome them.

PRIDE

The very first of the seven deadly sins is pride. What is pride and what makes it wrong. The Macquarie Dictionary defines pride as a "high or inordinate opinion of one's own dignity, importance, merit or superiority." This dictionary notes a difference between a high and an inordinate (i.e. excessive) opinion of oneself. There is nothing wrong with having a high opinion of ourselves, our achievements or our beliefs as long as they are realistic and not excessive.

Klyne Snodgrass in his book "Between Two Truths" has this to say about pride:

What is the origin of pride. Pride emerges from the legitimate and necessary desire to show that our lives have value. That is why we use the word positively, for example, in saying we take "pride" in our work. We mean that we have shown we can do something of value. Pride becomes twisted, however, because we think that a personal asset or accomplishment gives us more value.

Pride is the result of our thinking that our concerns, desires, and accomplishments are more important than those of other people. Like the disciples of Jesus who kept asking "Who is the greatest?" (Luke 22:24), we are not content with value, but desire superiority. Pride is no longer a feeling of accomplishment, but an estimation of ourselves as more valuable than someone else. Life then becomes dominated by the attempt to prop up that estimation (p.56-57).

That selfish focus on trying to prop up our own estimation in the sight of others that can dominate our lives is what John calls the "pride of life" in 1 John 2:16. The apostle John in that verse lists three of the most dominant ways that this sinful world influences us - through sensuality (doing whatever feels good regardless of the cost,

such as sexual promiscuity), materialism (an excessive desire to acquire money and things in our life) and the pride of life.

The first two are often motivated by pride. Sensuality and materialism are, for the most part, driven by an attitude of “I want what I want, when I want it and no one’s going to tell me otherwise or deny me what I want.”

Dr Dobson tells us that:

Sinful pride occurs when our arrogant self-sufficiency leads us to violate the two most basic commandments of Jesus: first, to love God with all our heart, mind and strength; and second, to love our neighbour as ourselves. A proud person is too pompous and haughty to bow humbly before his Maker, confessing his sins and submitting himself to a life of service; or he is hateful to his fellowman, disregarding the feelings and needs of others (Dr Dobson Answers Your Questions, p306).

Pride also can feed ambition for power and authority but the desire for that power and authority or greater status in life should be to serve others, not feed one’s ego as is so often the case in this world and even in the church at times. The desire to always be in control and control the lives of others, where one doesn’t want to be under anyone else’s authority, is rooted in selfishness so that person can do whatever they want.

There are many different shades of pride. To explain these different types of pride I’d like to quote from a book called “Why Do I Do What I Don’t To Do?” by William Backus and Marie Chapien.

The Pride of Other-Control

Billy sticks out his chin and says defiantly, ‘Don’t tell me what to do.’ He is firmly standing his ground. Clearly a person of decisiveness and willpower. He knows what he wants in life and nobody’s going to take it from him. He certainly can run things better than anyone else. One problem: Billy is the only one who thinks so. Self-control, a fruit of the Holy Spirit, is not Billy’s forte. He strives for other-control.

The pride of other-control is the inability to tolerate a situation unless in charge of it.

The basic lies Billy has nurtured are:

(1) My life shouldn’t be subject to the orders of anybody else; and

(2) I should be the one to decide what other people do; and

(3) I can do things just as well if not better than other people so they have no right to make demands of me.

Billy will deny that he makes demands to control others. If confronted, he will exclaim, "Who me? I certainly am not trying to control anyone. I'm perfectly happy to allow other people to be in the driver's seat. The reason I have to make all the decisions is because nobody else does."

The pride of other-control will surface in anger when somebody else has the authority. If you don't like to be told what to do by your pastor, your spouse, your teachers, or your parents, you might suspect a drive to control people. Do you find fault with fellow Christians? Do you resent law-enforcement officers? Some people get angry just at the sight of a policeman on the street because he represents a greater authority.

The person who feels he or she must be in charge at all times and in all situations devalues others' positions of authority: "All cops are crooks", "All doctors are quacks", "The president is a jerk..." The lie in the pride of other-control is, "I have every right to feel the way I do."

The Pride of Vanity

The pride of vanity is rooted in the misbelief, "The most important thing in life is that other people think highly of me and have only good and positive opinions of me."

Note, please, there is no sin in receiving human attention or having others speak well of you. A problem surfaces when you believe you've got to have attention, when you can't endure not being appreciated or recognized.

"Following close behind the initial misbelief of the pride of vanity are these two lies: "I can't stand it if I am not noticed," and, "I can't stand it if, when I am noticed, somebody doesn't think well of me."

"The pride of vanity craves attention. A person with the pride of vanity finds it difficult to pass the mirror without looking and adjusting his appearance. The pride of vanity uses the pronoun 'I' often.

Such a person brags and boasts and will subtly or unsubtly advertise how wonderful he is. For instance, a woman with the pride of vanity may tell you how handsome, talented, brilliant, and marvellous her husband and/or her children are. She sometimes will boast and brag to the point of being obnoxious, all the while thinking she is simply being supportive and encouraging to her loved ones, but actually swelling her own ego.

The pride of vanity is never satisfied with anything less than the greatest, the biggest and the best. The person with the pride of vanity feels he must be part of something earthshaking in order to be assured he is impressing others.

You may be saying now, "I don't have the pride of vanity because I never boast. In fact, whenever I talk about myself I put myself down. I always try to lift other people up higher than I."

Mary, a woman of thirty-nine, said, "Whenever I have people over for dinner and my guests tell me how much they have enjoyed the meal, I always tell them, 'Well, I

think I could have done better,' or I'll say, 'I suppose I could have cooked beef instead of chicken,' or something like that. I always manage to put myself down so that no one will think I'm proud."

That may sound like a person who is not vain, but that assumption is wrong. The person who puts himself or herself down as Mary does is really trying very hard to get someone else to say, "Why, you're wonderful." [the term fishing for praise comes to mind] The only way to obtain such reassurance is to put yourself down so others will argue and tell you how terrific you are. That is the pride of vanity.

When we sin we are telling ourselves that something is good for us even if God has told us clearly it is not good. Even as Christians we can be misled to think that we and what we do are the most important things in the world—rather than God and His doings.

Pride says things like, "I have to prove myself to be perfect. I must be 100% committed to my endeavours, and if I am only 99% successful, that is not good enough. I must try harder. I must work harder. I must improve, advance, achieve and do something of value, or die."

Now I ask you, is this the kind of person you want as a friend, husband, wife, boss, sister, or brother? Such a person tells God, "Watch me improve myself without your help. Watch me get more spiritual." The proud person loses sight of the fact that the only way to improve, advance, achieve, and grow spiritually is through Christ and through the guidance of His Spirit of Truth.

The Pride of Presumption

Presumptuous pride says, "I can do anything. In fact, I can do anything better than you can." We see a lot of this kind of pride in people who believe they are qualified to give medical advice without medical training. Presumption is the belief that anything anybody else does I can do also. Even if I clearly don't have the ability, I behave as if I did.

The pride of presumptuousness believes these lies:

(1) "I should have all the authority and ability anybody else does, spiritual or otherwise."

(2) "It's intolerable that somebody should be higher than I. I ought to be the teacher or the preacher or the one in charge or the one getting all the recognition."

(3) "I can do a better job than the other person, even without preparing."

(4) "It's intolerable that other people get to do things I am denied. I should be able to try everything."

The person with the pride of presumption will think he can order God around. This person will decide what he or she wants and then believe that he can have it and tell God, "I expect you to do exactly as I say." The pride of presumption actually lowers God; it orders Him around and uses scripture to back up the presumptuousness.

The Pride of Rebellion

If a person with the pride of rebellion thinks someone is telling him or her what to do, he becomes most upset. He hates criticism. A rebellious person will not allow anyone to tell him there is anything wrong with him.

When the pride of rebellion holds a ruling position in a life, the person will reveal in a number of ways that he is saying to God, "Move over, God. You have been hogging the throne too long. It's not right that I, with all my abilities and potential, should be restrained from power." He or she may even get angry and have a temper tantrum.

The pride of rebellion is revealed when we insist we do something no matter what anybody else says about it. Suppose I decide that I intend to steal something. Before I do it, I will have to tell God to move over—"Quit running my life, God, because if you run my life I can't steal." Of course, I would never actually say those words or form such a sentence because I don't admit to myself I have those feelings.

Suppose you become angry at your wife because you're tired of being sweet and understanding when she treats you so badly. For once you're going to really let her have it. You think you have a right to tell God to move over because He's been running your life all wrong. After all, your wife is just getting increasingly arrogant.

Name a sin that is a problem for you and it will be a sin you think you have every right to commit. Whenever you sin you have to believe something is good for you which God has said is not good. The pride of rebellion says it's good to get your own way no matter who you hurt or how you get it.

The Pride of Self-sufficiency

Many times we treat God as just a good resource, someone to be consulted when things are too difficult to handle by ourselves. Don't think only non-Christians are guilty of this. We Christians may pray, read our Bibles and go to church, and yet never truly reach out for more and more of Jesus and give ourselves to a total dependence upon God. We aren't always the God-sufficient people we were called to be.

When God is our sufficiency, we become completely dependent, for He—the all powerful one—is at the helm of our lives. It's a strange paradox that the more helpless we become toward Him, the stronger we become. This does not mean that we can sit back, do nothing and say, "If God wants me to go to church, He'll just have to wake me up and get me there." That's like saying, "If God wants me to breathe, He'll do it for me." God empowers us, but we must still choose to act.

The pride of self-sufficiency says, "I will get out of life just what I put into it," and "I can manage my own life," and "A person needs to learn to stand on his own two feet," and "When I was your age, I was already earning my own living!" All of these statements may sound reasonable, but pride turns good into evil. For example, the "I can manage my own life" misbelief means that all rewards must be self-directed and self-gratifying, even to the exclusion of God.

Don't be surprised when we tell you Christians can crave praise and attention just as anyone else. However, craving attention and desiring it are two different things. One gains attention when he stops craving it. Does that sound confusing? Connie craved attention. She was desperate for attention. When it did not come from her husband, she retreated into self-pity and told herself the only way she could get what she wanted was to leave her husband.

Pride not only craves attention but nearly goes mad without it. The pride of self-sufficiency will applaud itself, boast about itself and always do that which it thinks is best for itself. The pride of self-sufficiency will be found in the person who craves and seeks contacts with people who can help him or her. He also seeks out people who are pathetically needy or in distress so he can feel superior.

Here are some pride of superiority misbeliefs:

- **'I'm so terrific I can tell others what to do.'**
- **'I've got the answer and others don't.'**
- **'I'm better than others because I'm more self-sufficient.'**
- **'I'm important because others come to me for help.'**
- **'People need someone like me because I have the answers and help they need.'**
- **'People who are in need are inferior to me because I'm not in need.'**

The prideful act of being the inferior one gives one the distinction of being able to talk about it. "Oh, poor Matilda. She's depressed again—just can't seem to get a grip on herself. She was here again to ask me for my counsel and advice. Naturally I helped as much as I could, and I told her to put her trust in the Lord..."

The pride of self-sufficiency says, "People are helped when they come to me and I deserve a lot of praise for that." The person then can say such things as, "Oh, no, don't give me any praise. I just give all the glory to the Lord."

To be free of self-sufficient pride, we have to admit we have it. That is the first step toward deliverance. When we admit there is a problem we can be on the way to healing and renewal (p 48-58).

Before we look at the solution to pride I'd like to quote a few extracts from an article entitled "Coming to Grips with Pride" which appeared in the August 1986 Good News which also discusses some of the different types of pride. Neil Earle writes:

One educator has warned, "The principal forces of our age are anti-authoritarian!" He was referring to such hallmarks of our time as democracy, evolution, psychology and entertainment. These forces are deeply embedded in the thinking of the society around us. But they batter away at God's people as well!

The Bible predicts that three main personality types will dominate in this end-time society. Jude, a brother of Jesus Christ and a leader in the first-century Church of

God, catalogues them in a brief but pointed letter that, with the book of Revelation, closes the New Testament.

The Bible reveals that pride was the trigger for Satan's rebellion long ago, before man was ever created (Isaiah 14:12-14, I Timothy 3:6).

Pride could thus be called the original sin. And it always goes before destruction (Proverbs 16:18). Satan has insidiously pumped every human mind on this planet with this dangerous attitude. Those who claim they are the most free from it are usually most blinded by it. Pride is just that deceptive.

That is why God inspired His servant Jude to personalize pride with three case histories from the Old Testament. Jude vividly parades before us “the way of Cain,” “the error of Balaam” and “the rebellion of Korah” (Jude 11). He singled out these three notorious case histories because he knew they mirrored attitudes with which every carnal mind is in tune.

Jesus Christ was concerned about people's motives — why they did good deeds rather than the good deeds themselves. He knew that man's reason and moral impulses are distorted by “the pride of life” (I John 2:16), the more or less unconscious belief that we ourselves are the final authority, that we are quite capable of running our lives at our own pace.

This enthronement of self, this confidence in our own ability, this determination deep inside that we can operate independently of God, this carefully concealed self-will, is what the Bible calls pride (Romans 12:3). It is actually rebellion against God and God's authority.

Cain's false humility

Cain, killer of his brother Abel, was the world's first murderer (Genesis 4:8). **With very few humans around, he couldn't very well resort to one of the cardinal tricks of pride, blaming others. So instead he blamed God!** When God indicted Cain, Cain's first reaction was an accusative, “Am I my brother's keeper?” (verse 9).

Underneath these few words lurked a hostile attitude. Cain, like his parents Adam and Eve Before him, tried to dodge correction (Genesis 3:12-13). That is as natural to the carnal mind as breathing is to the lungs.

Don't be fooled by Cain's ‘woe is me’ tactic of self-pity. There was no humility, no real repentance, no deeply mortified earnestness to do better. How can we tell? By the fruits (Matthew 7:16).

Balaam's permissiveness

Balaam, pagan priest and prophet of ancient Mesopotamia, had a reputation to maintain (Numbers 22:6). When Balak, king of Moab, dangled a large fee before him if he would put a curse on the nation of Israel, Balaam's mouth watered. But Balaam knew he could do no more than the true God allowed (verse 18).

But Balaam wanted the “wages of unrighteousness” (II Peter 2:15). He also wanted his precious reputation preserved intact, a major concern to false teachers (Matthew 23:6-7).

In the sometimes humorous and ironic narrative in the book of Numbers, Balaam revealed himself to be a compromiser at heart. He would push as far as he could in the wrong way without, he hoped, incurring the wrath of God.

Balaam's attitude was: “Just how much can I get away with?” God finally gave Balaam enough rope to hang himself by letting him go with the Moabites. God then overruled Balaam's prophecies (Numbers 23:11).

The error of Balaam was stubborn self-will, trying to get around as many of God's commands as possible. Balaam wanted to find out how much he could get away with while at the same time appeasing and “stroking” the one in charge—in this case, God. Do we?

Korah: champion of the underdog

The cause of rebels has often seemed right and just. The pride of human nature loves to portray itself as the champion of the oppressed, the hero of the underdog against real or imagined grievances.

Korah was like that. He was one of Moses' cousins (Exodus 6:18, 20-21). He was one of the “men of renown” in the congregation of ancient Israel (Numbers 16:2). He held a prominent position in the priesthood (verse 9)

But the hardness of pride enveloped him. He couldn't escape its clutches. Korah's deceptive pride had no doubt convinced him that he was not really rebelling. He saw himself as rescuing Israel from despotism. He was altering the government to more equitably serve the needs of the people, or even more grandiose deceptions (Jude 16).

Korah was easily able to lead the murmurers, complainers and other hardened rebels in the camp into an altruistic-sounding, “more power to the people” campaign (Numbers 16:1). Korah's cunning craftiness soon fashioned a plausible pitch: “Moses' promises are worthless. We were promised milk and honey, but we're still slogging around in this wilderness” (verses 13-14).

That was true—up to a point.

The nation was still in the wilderness, but not because of Moses. Israel's own rebelliousness and lack of faith caused it (Deuteronomy 1:30-35). That part Korah and his conspirators conveniently left out. They slanted the story. The moral? Even if there's a certain amount of truth in what rebels say, they're still rebels.

The attack on Moses and Aaron was brazen and blunt: “You take too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation is holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them.” Notice how they invoked God's name to make treason seem righteous. “Why then do you exalt yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?” (Numbers 16:3).

Moses prostrated himself in abject humility, fearful that God would wipe out these arrogant upstarts and the nation in a flash (verse 4). And Moses was right. An earthquake destroyed Korah and his rebels in plain view of the nation (verses 32-35).

The Antidote to Pride

How do we defeat pride in our life? What is the cure? What is the first step? Backus and Chapian told us before that “To be free of self-sufficient pride, we have to admit we have it. That is the first step toward deliverance. When we admit there is a problem we can be on the way to healing and renewal.” We looked at the different types of pride. Understanding what they are and what their symptoms are, check yourself against those symptoms and see whether they are to be found in life. Reject the lies of pride and avoid that kind of thinking and those kind of actions.

The antidote to pride is humility. Humility or meekness is lacking selfishness, pride or vanity. We need to have the right kind of pride in our talents and achievements but not an overestimation where we look down on others or insist on our own way at the expense of what others want.

The Handbook of Bible Application makes these comments about pride and its antidote humility:

“I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home forgiven! For the proud shall be humbled, but the humble shall be honoured.” (Luke 18:14, TLB)

Pride can cut us off from God and others. The Pharisee in Jesus' parable did not go to the temple to pray to God but to announce to all within earshot how good he was. The tax collector went recognizing his sin and begging for mercy.

Self-righteousness is dangerous. It leads to pride, causes a person to despise others, and prevents him or her from learning anything from God. The tax collector's prayer should be our prayer because we all need God's mercy every day.

“For Christ himself is our way of peace. He has made peace between us Jews and you Gentiles by making us all one family, breaking down the wall of contempt that used to separate us” (Ephesians 2:14, TLB).

Pride distorts our view of ourself and others. Jews and Gentiles alike could be guilty of spiritual pride—Jews for thinking their faith and traditions elevated them above everyone else, Gentiles for trusting in their achievements, power, or position.

Spiritual pride blinds us to our own faults and magnifies the faults of others. Be careful not to become proud of your salvation. Instead, humbly thank God for what he has done, and encourage others who might be struggling in their faith.

“Then Joshua tore his clothes and fell facedown to the ground before the ark of the LORD, remaining there till evening. The elders of Israel did the same, and sprinkled dust on their heads.” (Joshua 7:6, NIV)

Humility is the proper attitude before God. Joshua and the elders tore their clothing and sprinkled dust on their heads as signs of deep mourning before God. They were confused by their defeat at the small city of Ai after the spectacular Jericho victory, so they went before God in deep humility and sorrow to receive his instructions. When our life falls apart, we also should turn to God for direction and help. Like Joshua and the elders, we should humble ourselves so that we will be able to hear his words.

Humility keeps us from depending on our own strengths. When Joshua first went against Ai (7:3), he did not consult God but relied on the strength of his army to defeat the small city. Only after Israel was defeated did they turn to God and ask what happened.

Too often we rely on our own skills and strength, especially when the task before us seems easy. We go to God only when the obstacles seem too great. However, only God knows what lies ahead. Consulting him, even when we are on a winning streak, may save us from grave mistakes or misjudgments. God may want us to learn lessons, remove pride, or consult others before he will work through us.

Humility makes our prayers direct and honest. Imagine praying the way Joshua prayed to God. This is not a formal church prayer; it is the prayer of a man who is afraid and confused by what is happening around him. Joshua poured out his real thoughts to God.

Hiding your needs from God is ignoring the only one who can really help. God welcomes your honest prayers and wants you to express your true feelings to him. Any believer can become more honest in prayer by remembering that God is all-knowing and all-powerful and that his love is everlasting.

Obedience to God begins with humility. We must believe that his way is better than our own. We may not always understand his ways of working, but by humbly obeying, we will receive his blessings. We must remember that (1) God's ways are best; (2) God wants our obedience more than anything else; and (3) God can use anything to accomplish his purposes.

Humility increases our appreciation for God. To respect God's majesty, we must compare ourselves to his greatness. When we look at creation, we often feel small by comparison. To feel small is a healthy way to get back to God but God does not want us to dwell on our smallness. Humility means proper respect for God, not self-depreciation.

“For everyone who tries to honour himself shall be humbled; and he who humbles himself shall be honoured” (Luke 14:11, TLB).

Humility is essential for service to others. Jesus advised people not to rush for the best places at a feast. People today are just as eager to raise their social status, whether by being with the right people, dressing for success, or driving the right car.

Whom do you try to impress? Rather than aiming for prestige, look for a place where you can serve. If God wants you to serve on a wider scale, he will invite you to take a higher place.

Jesus Christ is our model for humility. How can we humble ourselves? Some people try to give the appearance of humility in order to manipulate others. Others think that humility means putting themselves down.

Truly humble people compare themselves only with Christ, realize their sinfulness, and understand their limitations. On the other hand, they also recognize their gifts and strengths and are willing to use them as Christ directs. Humility is not self-degradation; it is realistic assessment and commitment to serve.”(p.313-315)

ENVY

The second of the seven deadly sins is that of envy. Envy is a close cousin of jealousy and is often used interchangeably by many for envy but there is a difference between the two. Envy is always wrong but there is a right and wrong kind of jealousy. By understanding the right and wrong kind of jealousy we can understand the difference between envy and jealousy. I quote again from *Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?* by William Backus & Marie Chapian:

Certain jealousy may be sinful, and yet other times it may be the appropriate desire to keep what is yours to yourself. It may be appropriate for a person to be jealous for his spouse. Notice we don't use the word “suspicious”. “Jealous” and “suspicious” should not be used interchangeably.

Godly jealousy in marriage refers to a desire to keep united that which God has sacredly united. [It is an intolerance to unfaithfulness.]

There are times when jealousy is not appropriate—namely, when a thing is not rightfully ours. Jealousy, then, to be a godly emotion, must be motivated by the desire to guard what is rightfully ours. Envy is a different matter.

Envy has nothing to do with what we already have. The envious person is worried about what somebody else has. The envious person cannot tolerate somebody's having something he or she wants and cannot have”(p.64).

Now envy may not be the same thing as jealousy but it is an exact synonym for the word covet. The Macquarie Dictionary defines the word covet in this way - to desire another's possessions inordinately (i.e. excessively). Coveting, as we know, is prohibited in the tenth commandment.

How do we know that we have envy? How do we diagnose this sin of coveting in our life? I'd like to quote again from Backus and Chapian's book “*Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?*”:

Picture one of your neighbours—the one who makes more money than you do; whose children get straight 'A's' while yours come home with report cards they'd rather bury; whose spouse is more attractive than yours; whose lawn is always mown, raked and verdant green while yours is a briar patch with dandelion fur; whose car has two more cylinders than your car; who is younger and has a better job than you— isn't this fun?—who is healthier than you; who gets all the breaks you wish you had; who heralds from a wealthy family, the family you'd do anything to be a member of.

Now imagine driving along the freeway and seeing the flashing light of a highway patrol car on the shoulder of the road. Someone has just been pulled over and the officer is writing a ticket. As you pass by and glance at the driver of the car, you realize it is your perfect neighbour! What is your immediate feeling? Be honest now. Could it be that you feel the tiniest bit of delight?

Perhaps you would prefer to tell us you feel only sympathy for your poor neighbour. As for the rest of us mortals, however, when somebody who has more than we do receives something bad, we don't feel very sad about it. In fact, we usually feel quite delighted. Unfortunately that emotion is not very godly and indicates the presence of the deadly sin of envy.

It can easily be diagnosed: If you feel miserable when you see the success of somebody else, you have it. (Or if you feel satisfaction from another's misfortune, you have it.)....

The envious person cannot tolerate somebody's having something he or she wants and cannot have.

Envy is a tormentor. Envy can make a person miserable from dawn till dusk, Sunday through Saturday. You will always find yourself exposed to people who have something you don't.

To be victorious, the Christian must come to grips with the fact that he is responsible for himself and he cannot control everything around him. An envious person, on the other hand, is never happy unless he can control things.

Try this exercise: On a piece of paper, list the things you think would make you happy. Maybe something like passing your final exams with straight 'A's'; landing a higher-paying job; going on a clothes shopping spree; marrying the prince; feeling healthier; having acceptance from others; being respected, loved. You make your own list. Then review your list, noting items that indicate envy. You are probably more envious than you had expected. 'A house like Shirley's,' 'to be as thin as Nancy'....

Envy is the disposition to be unhappy because somebody else is happy. If someone is not a competitor of yours, or if he is not a threat to you, you may not envy him. For example, if one of your children receives a blessing in her life, you may not necessarily envy her. However, if the same child has a trait you wish you had, or if she threatens you with her success, you will probably become envious. Changing your beliefs is the only cure for envy.

You may not be bothered if some poor soul who is worse off than you has some good thing happen to him—he poses no threat to you. But when somebody you view as a rival, such as a peer, sibling, or even your best friend, does well, you may envy with a passion.

When the envious person receives a blessing, it somehow doesn't seem as good as it should be. It loses its luster, its appeal. For instance, you are full of envy because your friend got a new car, so you buy one, too. Why aren't you happy now? You feel discontented because when you look at your car and realize that it is yours, you decide it can't be very good. Your friend's car is good, not yours. You will be happy only if your friend's car breaks down and yours doesn't. "He's suffering and I'm not" then becomes a comfort.

The old aphorism "The grass is always greener on the other side of the fence" becomes, "My grass may be green here, but it would look a lot greener if the grass across the fence died and turned brown."

The deadly sin of envy knows only one way to be happy and that is in someone else's downfall.

Have you every heard comments like, "My friend might think he's pretty big stuff now that he has a new car, but he'll find out that a car is not the answer to all his problems," or "So-and-so may be pretty but remember, beauty is only skin deep, and she's probably a total idiot under that glamorous exterior," or "So and-so is so smart—I hate him," or "He may be a wonderful singer today, but what will he do when his voice leaves him tomorrow?" or "Big deal if so-and so received the raise at work. He will never be able to hold on to such a demanding job anyhow" or "Did you hear about so-and-so? Can you believe how rich and famous he is, and now he's sitting in jail?" Gratification at someone else's downfall comes from envy.

Low self-esteem not only accompanies pride, as we saw in the last chapter, it generates envy. There is a high correlation between pride and envy in this respect. If you are envious, your self-esteem will go down as somebody else's goes up. If you see someone whom you consider a peer or a rival having more than you, you will not only feel bad that he has it, but you will feel less a person because of it. Your unspoken self-talk may be, "His success just shows what a loser I am."

Your self-esteem may drop when you see that your neighbour has more money than you, or when you see someone who has more fame or talent than you. Your self-esteem takes a beating because someone else is superior to you.

Envy therefore eagerly exposes the defects of the other person. "Far be it from me to say something about the teacher," the envious person will drone in a hushed tone, "but, let me tell you, I know," or "I don't want to put anybody down, but I think people should be aware that back in 1978, so-and-so was arrested and charged with...."

Martin Luther, in his explanation of the [ninth] commandment, "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbour," says, "We should fear and love God that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbour. But defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything"...

Envy, unlike any of the other deadly sins, promises but one thing: unhappiness. The other sins each promise something that appears to be good. We usually commit sin because we think we are going to get something beneficial by doing so. The deadly sin of pride tells us that we should be on top and that nothing else is good enough for us.

The deadly sin of anger promises us the satisfaction of getting even with our enemies, which will make us feel good. The deadly sin of greed tells us having more money, friends, possessions, prestige, etc., will be good for us. The deadly sins of lust and gluttony promise temporary sensual pleasures we tell ourselves would be good for us and that we deserve to enjoy....But envy is different. It promises nothing but wretched misery from start to finish. It's an insidious sin which many people are unable to diagnose in themselves.

If there is no payoff for envy, why do we tolerate it? If we were to ask ourselves why we practice envy in our life, could we give ten answers? Or even three? Let's diagnose our envy and stop lying to ourselves about it...

How many times do we all bluff our way through painful envy with falsely hearty tones in our voices as we congratulate somebody for something we want? It's very difficult to keep the colour green from showing as we flash our fake smiles.

The "Good-Loser Syndrome" tries to sound pleased in the face of someone else's triumph, while we're sick with envy. We can, according to Romans 12, be transformed by the renewing of our mind so that we may prove what is good and acceptable and the perfect will of God in our life. Our mind becomes new when we refuse to tell ourselves the lies we've believed for so long.

Have you been telling yourself any of the following lies?

- **'Someone is better than I am, therefore I am in a terrible situation for me.'**
- **'Somebody is better than I am and it would be terrible if somebody discovered that fact.'**
- **'Things should be the way I want them to be.'**
- **'I must categorize everyone as to whether or not they are better than I am.'**
- **'I cannot be happy if other people have more than I have.'**
- **'Someone else should not do better or have more talent than I.'**
- **'Other people should not live better than I.'**

In order to eliminate such misbeliefs in your life, you must counteract them with the truth. Begin by examining what you tell yourself. Then start to convince yourself of the truth.....

It really does not make any difference at all if somebody is better off than you are. It does not make any difference if someone has things you want or is possibly more talented than you. There will always be someone with an ability, trait, character disposition, skill or knowledge that you do not have. You can enjoy your life in spite of that.

If you categorize people as superior or inferior to you, you are cherishing an illusion. You may see the next-door neighbour who makes more money than you and feel unhappy about it, but is he better than you because he is richer than you?

Does richer mean better? Al Capone was rich. Or does fame mean better? Jack the Ripper was famous. Or does power mean better? Jezebel had power. Idi Amin had power.

Our value as people comes through God. He has made us; He has loved us; He has redeemed us. That is why we have value and why nobody is inferior. When you understand this, you can become a friend instead of an enemy to yourself.(p.63-72)

The Handbook of Bible Application makes the following comments about envy and its antidote - contentment:

Envy demonstrates a lack of trust in God. To covet is to desire another person's property. We are not to set our desires on anything that belongs to someone else. Not only can such desires make us miserable, they can also lead us to other sins such as adultery and stealing...

“So Ahab went home, sullen and angry because Naboth the Jezreelite had said. "I will not give you the inheritance of my fathers." He lay on his bed sulking and refused to eat.’(1 Kings 21:4, NIV)

Envy can easily lead to other sins. Envy and desire for another's property led the way to murder in this case. But Ahab refused to admit his sin against God. Instead he accused Elijah of being his enemy for bringing him God's warning of punishment. When we are blinded by envy and hatred, it is almost impossible to see our own sin....

Envy is a useless exercise because God is able to provide everything we really need, even if He does not always give us everything we want. To stop coveting, we need to practice being content with what we have.

The apostle Paul emphasizes the significance of contentment in Philippians 4:11. It's a matter of perspective. Instead of thinking about what we don't have, we should thank God for what he has given and strive to be content. After all, our most important possession is....available to everyone - eternal life through Christ.(p.191)

To conclude this section on envy I'd like to quote from a Good News article entitled "Don't Let Envy Colour Your Thoughts."

John (the Baptist) recognized that while he was preaching alone he had a major role in the work of God. But he also knew that as soon as another person was appointed to fulfill a more important position, then he should gladly submit and offer help to that individual.

Look now at the life of Saul's son Jonathan. Jonathan reacted to David in a manner totally unlike his father did.

Jonathan could have expected to be the next king of Israel, but somehow he must have known that David was to receive that position. And he handed David his robe, sword and bow, almost as symbols of the authority being passed to the already anointed son of Jesse (1 Samuel 18:4).

Probably from their first encounter, a great friendship developed between the two young men. Each was willing to serve the other with no thought of personal gain. Humanly speaking, Jonathan could have become envious of the ex-shepherd. But he didn't. And Jonathan's example of encouragement and help for one who was to receive promotion and honour is something we should emulate....

If, in spite of fervent prayer about some need you feel you have, some position you would like to be in or an opportunity you hope will come your way, you are passed over, then remember this: "To whom much is given, from him much will be required" (Luke 12:48). Then ask yourself, "Am I certain that I could have seen the assignment through?" Disappointment now could be better than possible failure later.

Having an envious attitude toward another individual is like having a cancerous growth in your body. It will eat away at your mind and give you a distorted view of the attributes of others and yourself. As the author of Proverbs was moved to observe, "Envy is rotteness to the bones" (Proverbs 14:30).

People in this world often feel envious of film stars, business tycoons and the like who live in expensive homes, drive flashy cars and generally seem to have a lot going for them—physically, at least.

In God's Church we sometimes feel this way, too. And maybe we think the world has got it easy when we look at the trials that we and other Christians have to endure.

On one occasion David let similar thoughts get the better of him: "For I was envious of the boastful... they have more than heart could wish.... Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocence' (Psalms 73:3, 7, 13). But those thoughts lasted but a short time; 'until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.... For indeed, those who are far from You shall perish' (verses 17, 27).

The people in this world have no possessions that will last, so why be envious of them? And if we are inclined to think their lives are trouble free, then we, too, should consider the soon-coming end result of this world's ways.

The antidote for envy is love (I Corinthians 13:4), and that comes from God's Holy Spirit.

If we have trouble acknowledging the success of others, then we need to ask God for help. He will answer a prayer offered in sincerity, for it is His will that we develop concern for others.

As the apostle Paul wrote, "Let no one seek his own, but each one the other's well-being" (I Corinthians 10:24). And, from the same writer: "Love must be sincere.... Honour one another above yourselves" (Romans 12:9-10, NIV).

If an opportunity presents itself for someone else, we as Christians must do whatever we can to make the situation work out well for the other person. The instruction is this: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Philippians 2:3).

Envy will lead to hate. And hate takes the happiness out of life and makes us miserable and embittered. But, more important, hate is an attitude that will keep us out of God's Kingdom.

So the next time you are tempted to envy the blessings of another, remember that we should "walk properly . . . not in strife and envy. But put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the flesh, to fulfill its lusts" (Romans 13:13, 14)"

ANGER

Deadly sin number three is that of anger. To open up this section on anger I'd like to quote at length from Charles Swindoll's very fine book "Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back"

A great American statesman, Thomas Jefferson, worked out a way to handle his anger. He included it in his 'Rules of Living,' which describes how he believed adult men and women should live. He wrote this:

"When angry, Count ten before you speak. If very angry, a hundred."

Author Mark Twain, about seventy-five years later, revised Jefferson's words. He wrote:

"When angry, count four. When very angry, swear."

Those of us with a streak of honesty will have to say we've tried nearly everything from Jefferson's philosophy to Twain's, and we still can't seem to handle our anger very effectively. It's a real problem. If you wrestle with a bad temper, you may be laughing on the outside, but crying on the inside. I don't know of anything more frustrating to deal with than anger (it makes me mad!). It has a way of disarming us, of robbing us of our testimonies. It injures our home lives and our relationships with co-workers.

Some time ago a man sat in my study and poured out his anguish. He had battered his wife the night before. She was too humiliated (and bruised) to come with him. Both, by the way, are christians.

I sat in the Orange County jail with a young father, his face buried in his hands. Tears ran through his fingers as he told me of his temper. He had just killed his infant daughter with his own hands—in an uncontrollable rage. He had been irritated by the baby's crying as he was listening to music.

No, anger isn't a humorous matter. It's something that must be understood, admitted, and kept under control, or it will literally slay us.

What Is Anger?

Let me begin by defining what anger is, and that's not easy. I've woven together several different resources and have come up with this definition:

Anger is an emotional reaction of hostility that brings personal displeasure, either to ourselves or to someone else.

People who study psychology tell us there are various phases of anger. All of us have experienced some of them.

Anger can begin with mild irritation, which is nothing more than perhaps an innocent experience of being upset, a mild feeling of discomfort brought about by someone or something. Then anger can turn from irritation to indignation, which is a feeling that something must be answered; there must be an avenging of that which is wrong. But both irritation and indignation can go unexpressed.

If fed, indignation leads to wrath—which never goes unexpressed. Psychologists tell us that wrath is a strong desire to avenge. Then, as it increases, anger becomes fury. The word suggests violence, even a loss of emotional control.

The last phase of anger is rage. Obviously, rage is the most dangerous form of anger....

In Ephesians 4:26-27 we have two verses that have to do with anger.

“Be angry, and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity.”

The Amplified Bible renders those verses this way:

“When angry, do not sin; do not ever let your your exasperation, your fury or indignation - last until the sun goes down. Leave no [such] room or foothold for the devil - give no opportunity to him.”

The New English Bible says it this way:

“If you are angry, do not let anger lead you into sin; do not let sunset find you still nursing it; leave no loop hole for the devil.”

The very first time I looked at this verse in depth, I did a double-take. Do you realize that God is saying to you, “Get mad!” That's right. If that were the end of verse 26, we would put an exclamation point over the word “angry.” Be angry! How about that! When's the last time you obeyed the Scriptures and “blew your cool”?

I see three important things in these verses. The first is simple and clear. Anger is a God-given emotion.

There's something inhuman about a person who never gets angry. He has a strange makeup. We would be quick to say that one who does not show compassion really does not have a heart. And one who doesn't love—well, there's something terribly wrong with him. These emotions are God-given, and He says to express them. The same is true of anger. God says, “Be angry.”

The second observation goes right along with the first. Anger is not necessarily sinful. God says, “Be angry, and yet do not sin.” Not every expression of anger is wrong.

It's as though I were to say to one of my children, “Now, when you go out tonight. Enjoy yourself. Really have a good time. But don't misuse your humour.” Or it's like the Lord when He says, “I want you to love, but don't love the world. Don't even love the things of the world. I want you to love, but restrict that love to certain things.” This is the same thought. Be angry, but don't carry that anger to the point where it becomes sin.

Some of you may be questioning whether or not it is ever right to be angry. Did you know that in the Old Testament ‘the anger of the Lord’ is mentioned no less than eighteen times?

And in the New Testament we have some classic examples of Jesus' anger! When those moneychangers were in the temple, He didn't walk in and say, ‘Now listen, guys, I don't want to offend you, but what you are doing isn't very good.’ Rather, he plaited together a whip of thongs and physically drove them out of the temple. His was an expression of real indignation. He got mad!

And Jesus never spoke more angrily and forthrightly to anyone than He did to the religious hypocrites in Matthew 23, where in one case after another He said, “Woe to you.” He even called them “whitewashed tombs” and “serpents”! There are times when anger is very appropriate. I'll say more about that later.

Third, anger must have safeguards. Notice the two safeguards Paul gave us right in this passage?

Safeguard number one:

“Do not let the sun go down on your anger” (Eph. 4:26).

Don't prolong anger into the night. In Paul's day, the setting of the sun was the closing of the day and the beginning of the next. At the end of the day, make sure your anger problem is solved.

I believe this is to be taken very literally. We practice this in our home; perhaps you do in yours. If there have been times of disagreement or anger throughout the day, clear them up by evening. When you lay your head on your pillow, make sure those feelings of anger have been resolved. Be certain that there is forgiveness, a clearing out of that conscience. Husbands and wives, don't go to sleep back to back. Don't allow yourself the luxury of feeling you can take care of it later on.

Every once in a while, a Christian brother or sister tells me of experience when they flew off the handle. They were in the wrong. And they will say something like, “You

know, as I turned in that night, things just didn't settle right." Maybe you've had that experience. I certainly have. Then they say, "I had to get up, turn the light on, and make a phone call ... or get dressed, go over to this person's house, and talk with him face to face to clear it up." It's a real encouragement to hear things like that.

That's what Paul was saying. Don't let sin come in by prolonging your anger. There are probably some scars in your life that are there because you didn't solve anger when it occurred. You know, ninety-nine percent of all problems never solve themselves. Never! They just stay on like a burr in the saddle, until a sore is formed and you become diseased.

Safeguard number two:

"Do not give the devil an opportunity" (Eph. 4:27).

That means just what it says. Don't allow your anger to be expressed in such a way that you are weakened and the devil reproduces his character through you.

You see, Jesus Christ loves to reproduce His character through us. When we are under the control of the Holy Spirit, then the character of Christ flows freely—His love, His gentleness, His compassion, His joy, His concern for others. But the devil is a master of counterfeit, and when we are given over to the doings of Satan, he aims to make us behave like him.

That's Paul's whole point. Don't let anger get hold of you and weaken you so that other areas of sin, or even satanic involvement, can come into your life. Keep that in mind if you are prone to get angry. Sustained, uncontrolled anger offers the enemy of our souls an open door. It's serious.

Let's face it: We're all made up differently. Some of us are more emotional than others. Some have much more trouble controlling anger than others. You know how you are made, what your areas of weakness are. And when you sense that it's getting to the point where it's beyond your control, you know the Lord is not in it. Don't give the devil an opportunity (p.149-153).

How Depression is Linked To Anger

Before we go on with Charles Swindoll's exposition on the subject of anger I'd to quote from an article entitled "Anger - Escaping the Curse" by Neil Earle that appeared in the September 1986 Good News to show how depression and anger are often linked to each other. Neil Earle writes:

The wrong type of anger blocks sound thinking. It is the easy way out, the cheap, characterless way, the way that intimidates and bullies but doesn't courageously and intelligently tackle the real problems. Overt, explosive anger only tenses the atmosphere, polarizes the parties involved, stifles meaningful feedback and leaves wounds that sometimes last a lifetime. It is the enemy of sound thinking (Ecclesiastes 9: 17).

And it doesn't make you feel better. Why? Because the overstimulation of the bloodstream produces toxins that course through the body, leaving the whole organism enervated and agitated. Worse — the problem still remains.

How wise the Scriptures are: “The merciful man does good for his own soul [Hebrew *nephesh*— total being], but he who is cruel troubles his own flesh” (Proverbs 11:17).

Millions of people suffer from depression in our society, unaware that depression, like anger, develops its own dynamic. This is because depression is often anger turned inward: We'd like to vent our frustrations on someone, but often we don't dare. We see the inwardly instead, harbouring the hostile, aggressive feelings deep down inside our human spirit.

Result? The resentments and envyings that we don't want to admit we have, the hostility we don't want to let slip out (especially against authority figures who can retaliate), these negative, fetid emotions eat away at us inside.

In time they can distort our whole spirit. Emotional spite, unrepented of, eats away at us deep inside (Matthew 15:19, James 4:1).

Sound farfetched?

Neurologist Mortimer Ostow, in his study *The Psychology of Melancholy*, reported, “Depression at every phase of its development includes a component of anger, whether visible or invisible, whether conscious or unconscious.”

The latent anger and resentment often rise to our consciousness as baffling waves of negativism—depression. In time the depression becomes such a virulent force that it is diagnosed as the cause of the problem when, quite often, it is the effect.

And this is not the happy way to live....Latent anger is scary. Try to spot it, admit it, face up to it and, with God's help, wrench yourself from it (Romans 7:23-24)....

King Ahab of ancient Israel never did grow up emotionally. Look at his reaction when his neighbour wouldn't accept Ahab's real-estate offer:

"So Ahab went into his house sullen and displeased . . . And he lay down on his bed, and turned away his face, and would eat no food. But Jezebel his wife came to him, and said to him, 'Why is your spirit so sullen that you eat no food?'" (I Kings 21:4-5).

This is classic disappointment, dejection and depression stemming from frustration. But frustration is often thwarted self-will. Ahab couldn't even eat. We've all known people like that. They turn their anger inward; misery and paralysis result. The more Ahab wallowed in self-pity, the more deeply embedded the anger and resentment became. It distorted his reasoning process till he was putty in wily Jezebel's hands (verses 7-14).

See how anger and depression are linked? They are virulent raging forces in their own right. God pleads with us: “He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city” (Proverbs 16:32).

Ahab, snivelling assassin that he was, cold-bloodedly murdered his neighbour. God was so angry He pronounced a curse on the dynasty (I Kings 21:20-24).

Now back to Charles Swindoll from his book "Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back":

When Is Anger Justified?

When can we actually say it is right to be angry? That's an important question. I find there are...specific situations in Scripture when anger is justifiable....

When God's Word and God's will are knowingly disobeyed by God's people.

Something should happen in the heart of the child of God who sees other believers sinning openly, ignoring and disobeying the will of God. It's not good for us to look on passively. Something's wrong! When Moses saw what was going on around that golden calf, he couldn't handle it. He got downright indignant (see Ex. 32:19,20).

Further, there is an instance in Solomon's life that shows us the Lord does not overlook acts of carnality. First Kings 11 is the very sad tale of Solomon's last years. He had been blessed with riches, the likes of which the world has never known. The late J. Paul Getty would look like a bum compared to Solomon. He was loaded. And he had more wives and concubines, it seems, than any other man who has ever lived. He had more wisdom than anyone else in Scripture. But look at the latter part of his life.

"Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, 'You shall not associate with them, neither shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.'" Solomon held fast to these in love.

"And he had seven hundred wives, princesses and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. For it came about when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been" (1 Kings. 11:1-4).

The next four verses describe his idolatrous practices. Then we read:

"Now the Lord was angry with Solomon because his heart we turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the Lord had commanded"(1 Kings. 11:9,10).

Anger is justified not only on man's part, but on the Lord's part when we openly and knowingly disobey His Word. On some fronts, grace has been twisted to convey the idea that God no longer has any standards, or that a godly quality of life is not expected of us, now that we've under grace. That is a perversion and a lie right out of the pit of hell.

The Scriptures show us that the Lord always has and always will become intensely angry when we choose to openly disobey Him. If you are continuing to live in open, knowing disobedience to God, I warn you that the Lord's anger is kindled against you....By His grace, He might permit you the time to see this, but I assure you that it will bear tremendous consequences.(p.154-155)

Before we look at what Charles Swindoll has to say about unjustified anger I'd like to quote from the Handbook of Bible Application in its section on controlled, righteous anger. We read:

How can we be angry without sinning?

"[Jesus] looked around at them in anger and, deeply distressed at their stubborn hearts, said to the man, 'Stretch out your hand.' He stretched it out, and his hand was completely restored" (Mark 3:5, NIV).

Anger can be a holy response to sin.

Jesus was angry about the Pharisees' uncaring attitudes. Anger itself is not wrong. It depends on what makes us angry and what we do with our anger. Too often we express our anger in selfish and harmful ways. By contrast, Jesus expressed his anger by correcting a problem—healing the man's hand. Use your anger to find constructive solutions rather than tear people down.

"As [Jesus] taught them, he said, 'Is it not written: My house will be called a house of prayer for all nations? But you have made it a den of robbers'" (Mark 11:17, NIV).

Anger does not have to lead to sin. Jesus became angry, but he did not sin. There is a place for righteous indignation. Christians are right to be upset about sin and injustice and should take a stand against them.

Unfortunately, believers are often passive about these important issues and instead get angry over personal insults and petty irritations. Make sure your anger is directed toward the right issues.

"But I tell you that anyone who is angry with his brother will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to his brother, "Raca," is answerable to the Sanhedrin. But anyone who says, "You fool!" will be in danger of the fire of hell.' (Matthew 5:22, NIV)

Anger is a danger signal. When Jesus said, 'But I tell you,' he was not doing away with the law or adding to it his own beliefs. Rather, he was giving a fuller understanding of why God made that law in the first place. For example, when Moses said, 'You shall not murder' (Exodus 20:13).

Jesus taught, 'Don't even become angry enough to murder, for then you have already committed murder in your heart.' The Pharisees read this law and, not having murdered, felt righteous. Yet they were angry enough with Jesus that they would soon plot his murder, though they would not do the dirty work themselves. We miss the intent of God's Word when we read his rules for living without trying to

understand why he made them. When do you keep God's rules but close your eyes to his intent?

Killing is a terrible sin, but anger is a great sin too because it also violates God's command to love. Anger in this case refers to a seething, brooding bitterness against someone. It is a dangerous emotion that always threatens to leap out of control, leading to violence, emotional hurt, increased mental stress, and spiritual damage. Anger keeps us from developing a spirit pleasing to God. Have you ever been proud that you didn't strike out and say what was really on your mind? Self-control is good, but Christ wants us to practice thought-control as well. Jesus said we will be held accountable even for our attitudes.

How does God express his anger?

"The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness." (Romans 1:18, NIV)

God's anger is directed at sin. Why is God angry at sinful people? Because they have substituted the truth about him with a fantasy of their own imagination (Romans 1:25). They have stifled the truth God naturally reveals to all people in order to believe anything that supports their own self-centred lifestyles.

God cannot tolerate sin because his nature is morally perfect. He cannot ignore or condone such willful rebellion. He wants to remove the sin and restore the sinner—if the sinner does not distort or reject the truth. But his anger erupts against those who persist in sinning.(p.32-33)

Now back to what Charles Swindoll has to say about unjustified anger. He writes:

When is Anger Unjustified?

(1) When anger comes from the wrong motive.

We've all studied the prodigal son, but we usually miss the prodigal that stayed home! He is the one who illustrates an anger that was not justified because it sprang from a wrong motive. When the younger brother came to himself, he was, you will recall, in a swinepen. He was at the end of his rope, and the Scripture says:

"But when he came to his senses, he said, '... I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men' "(Luke 15:17-19).

And he did that. You know the rest of the story. The father greeted him with open arms, delighted to have him there. But this joy was not shared by the wayward son's older brother.

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things might be. And he said to him, 'Your brother has come,

and your father has killed the fattened calf, because he has received him back safe and sound' "(Luke 5:25-27).

Now notice the jealous motive that resulted in anger.

"But he became angry, and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began entreating him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you, and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a kid that I might be merry with my friends; But when this son of yours came [notice he doesn't call him "my brother"; he was tremendously angry], who has devoured your wealth with harlots [How does he know that? The Bible never tells us his brother visited prostitutes. It's possible, but when you're angry and jealous, you exaggerate the story.] you killed the fattened calf for him."

"And he [the father] said to him, 'My child, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to be merry and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found'"(Luke 15:28-32).

When we are jealous of some other person, our response is frequently one of anger, especially when that other person receives some kind of commendation or promotion or attention from other people. "It isn't fair! That's my right to enjoy, not his!" That anger is unjustified.

Another case in point would be King Nebuchadnezzar. His anger was kindled by the motive of pride. That really does hit us in the heart, because we all wrestle with that old pride problem. Nebuchadnezzar had an immense golden image built - possibly an image of himself. He put it out in a public place and announced that everyone was to worship the image. It was idolatry in the grossest sense of the word. Nebuchadnezzar, filled with pride, announced through his heralds that everyone should worship this image—in other words, that they should worship Nebuchadnezzar.

It just so happened that some chose not to worship the image.

"There are certain Jews whom you have appointed over the administration of the province of Babylon, namely Shadrach, Meschach and Abed-nego. These men, O king, have disregarded you; they do not serve your gods or worship the golden image which you have set up" (Dan. 3:12).

As a result, something happened in Nebuchadnezzar's heart. Notice the response.

"Then Nebuchadnezzar in rage and anger [Why? Pride.] gave orders to bring Shadrach, Meschach, and Abed-nego; then these men were brought before the king" (Dan. 3:13).

This led to the fiery furnace and to God's miraculous deliverance of these Jewish believers from danger and death.

The thing we must ask ourselves when anger begins to come is, "What is the motive behind my feelings?"

(2) When things don't go your way. The Book of Jonah contains the most extensive revival recorded in history. The entire city of Nineveh believed by many Old Testament scholars to be half a million or more in population repented of their sins and turned to the Lord.

Jonah, of course, was a bigoted racist. He was a prophet, indeed, but he was a man who really wanted to see Nineveh destroyed, something of an ancient Archie Bunker! That is why he didn't go to Nineveh when God told him to the first time. He did not want Nineveh to repent; he wanted it blasted away. And he got angry because things didn't go his way.

"When God saw their deeds, that they turned away from their wicked way, and God relented concerning the calamity which He had declared He would bring upon them. And He did not do it. But it greatly displeased - Jonah, and he became angry" (Jon. 3:10-4:1).

Notice that the reason for his anger was that he didn't get his way - he wanted destruction, but God gave deliverance.

"And he prayed to the Lord and said, 'Please, Lord, was not this what I said while I was still in my own country? ["This is why I didn't want to go in the first place."] . . . Therefore now, O Lord, please take my life from me, for death is better to me than life.'

"And the Lord said, 'Do you have good reason to be angry'? (Jon. 4:2-4).

"Jonah went out to a hillside, refusing to answer the Lord. He sat down under a nice, leafy gourd vine to enjoy a little shade. Sitting comfortably there on that hill, the wind blowing softly, he thought, "My, this is living." Here, he could quickly forget about Nineveh. Then a little worm came and ate up that gourd plant, and it wilted. Jonah got hot and bothered, and begged God to take his life.

"Then God said to Jonah, 'Do you have good reason to be angry about the plant?' (Jon. 4:9).

This brings us to a very practical point. We really do like to have our own way. For example, you work hard all week and you think, "I will have a nice evening out with my wife on Friday night." You get it all arranged, and you drive to your favourite restaurant. There's a long line, but you are not worried. You walk up to the front and say, "I called in reservations for tonight."

The hostess says, "I'm sorry, sir, but I don't have your name written down here."

How do you respond? Unless I miss my guess, you become angry. Rather than saying, "Lord, what can I learn through this?" you think, "Listen, I've got my rights!"

"But I called in two days ago," you protest.

"Sorry."

So you wait in line. Steaming. Frowning. When you finally are seated, you get a bad table (it's near the door or the legs are uneven) and your waitress is irritable. Your food is cold. The candle goes out. The people around you are loud and boisterous.

This is where Christianity is put on the block. The real test is not in a Sunday service. It's in a Friday night restaurant when things don't go our way.

One of the best ways I know to keep from getting angry when we don't get our way is to have a good sense of humour. Turn the bad times into a little fun.

When we were living in Texas, our family planned for months to go to a state park for a camping vacation. We looked forward to it, but before we left we prayed, "Lord, whatever happens, we're going to have a good time."

It was a good thing we prayed that, because the place was a rat-hole. There were wall-to-wall people. It was hot—the weather was terrible! It was a great disappointment. We spent one night with spiders and scorpions, laughed it off, and headed back home. On the way, we stopped off at another state park where there wasn't a soul. I still can't understand it. We checked in and spent almost two full weeks in a place that was marvellously quiet and delightful, unseasonably cool and picturesque.

God seems to reward us with good, delightful experiences when we move with joy through those times when we didn't get our own way. The choice is ours. If we choose to be offended when we don't get our own way, then we're going to live constantly on the edge of anger. But if we say to ourselves, "A merry heart does good like a medicine," it'll make an the difference in the world.

(3) When you react too quickly without investigating the facts.

"The end of the matter is better than its beginning; Patience of spirit is better than haughtiness of spirit. Do not be eager in your heart to be angry, For anger resides in the bosom of fools" (Eccl. 7:8,9).

"But let everyone be quick to hear, slow to speak and slow to anger" (James 1:19).

If we have a patient spirit, if we hear a matter out, it is better than just hearing its beginning. If we are eager in our hearts to be angry, we're foolish.

It's a real concern to me that we have to live at such a hurried, harried pace. When the schedule is not met, the instant response of the foolish one is anger. Retaliate. Fight back. The writer of Ecclesiastes is saying, "If you do that, you're a fool."

This struck me during our last family vacation. It was amazing how much more patient we were when we got some times of sustained quietness. We were camping deep in the heart of the giant redwoods up near the Oregon border. Beneath the glow of our little red Coleman lantern, we sat around a fire each night. Quietness was all around. Each morning we arose to the chirp of birds and the river's rippling rapids. I don't think well ever forget it! As I recall, we didn't have one bout with anger during the whole three weeks.

Develop the art of quietness. Turn off the appliances, including the TV. In fact, wean yourself from it for an entire evening. Leave it off. Honestly, we will never become men and women of God without experiencing some solitude.

This is where the greats of the past had it over us. Men and women who walked with God did so because of their depth of life cultivated in silence. Part of the reason, fathers, that we are so irritable in our homes is that we're keeping such a rapid pace.

"He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, And he who rules his spirit, then he who captures a city" (Prov. 16:32). (Three Steps Forward Two Steps Back, p.159-164)

Before we look at the subject of how to deal with anger I'd like to quote again from the Handbook of Bible Application for its comments about unrighteous anger. We read:

When does anger become sin?

"Then the LORD said to Cain, 'Why are you angry? Why is your face downcast?'" (Genesis 4:6, NIV)

Uncontrolled anger will lead to sin. The Bible does not say why God rejected Cain's offering. Perhaps Cain's attitude was improper, or perhaps his offering was not up to God's standards. God evaluates both our motives and the quality of what we offer him. When we give to God and others, we should have a joyful heart because of what we are able to give.

How do you react when someone suggests you have done something wrong? Do you move to correct the mistake or deny that you need to correct it?

After Cain's offering was rejected, God gave him the chance to right his wrong and try again. God even encouraged him to do this! But Cain refused, and the rest of his life is a startling example of what happens to those who refuse to admit their mistakes. The next time someone suggests you are wrong, take an honest look at yourself and choose God's way instead of Cain's.

"Esau held a grudge against Jacob because of the blessing his father had given him. He said to himself, "The days of mourning for my father are near; then I will kill my brother Jacob." (Genesis 27:41, NIV)

Anger is often the result of bad decisions. Esau was so angry at Jacob that he failed to see his own wrong in giving away his birthright in the first place. Jealous anger keeps us from seeing the benefits we have and makes us dwell on what we don't have.

When Esau lost the valuable family blessing, his future suddenly changed. Reacting in anger, he decided to kill Jacob.

When you lose something of great value, or if others conspire against you and succeed, anger is the first and most natural reaction. But you can control your

feelings by (1) recognizing your reaction for what it is; (2) praying for strength; and (3) asking God for help to see the opportunities that even your bad situation may provide.

“The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell” (James 3:6, NIV).

Anger's choice tool is the tongue. James compares the damage the tongue can do to a raging fire—the tongue's wickedness has its source in hell itself. The uncontrolled tongue can do terrible damage. Satan uses the tongue to divide people and pit them against one another.

Idle words are damaging because they spread destruction quickly, and no one can stop the results once they are spoken. We dare not be careless with our words, thinking we can apologize later, for even if we do, the scars remain. A few words spoken in anger can destroy a relationship that took years to build. Before you speak, remember that words are like fire—you can neither control nor reverse the damage they can do.(p.31-32)

Before we look at how to deal with anger let's look at how not to deal with anger. I quote again from Neil Earle's article “Anger - Escaping the Curse”:

How Not To Overcome Anger

Unfortunately, a deceptive teaching today encourages people to ventilate their anger. “Don't hold it in, it'll harm you—let it out!” says this popular school of thought. “Don't suppress it, or you'll explode later on.”

Dr. James Dobson perceptively condemns the 'let-it-all-hangout' school of thought. There are alternatives:

"I have no desire to return our culture to the formalism of yesterday, when father was a marble statue and mother couldn't smile because her corset was too tight. But if our grandparents represented one extreme of emotional repression, today's (adults) have become temperamental yo-yos at the other.

"Reason is now dominated by feelings, rather than the reverse.

"The pop psyche movement ... encourages us to get in touch with our feelings ... to open up... to tell it like it is ... The past 10 years people in the 'helping sciences' have been obsessed by the need to express anger and resentment: 'Hatred is stored-up anger. Therefore, getting mad is a loving thing.'

"We must harmonize the finding that anger should be ventilated with the biblical commandment that we be 'slow to become angry' (James 1:19). I do not find these objectives to be in contradiction. Why else did the apostle Paul tell us to settle our irritations before sundown (Ephesians 4:26), preventing an accumulation of seething hostility?" (Emotions: Can You Trust Them?, pages 9-10, 94).

Don't be deceived. Rampant anger is a destructive force in its own right, regardless of the trigger. It can lead to tragedy. The Bible is very clear on that:

Cain lost control and in berserk, jealous rage at his brother became the first murderer (Genesis 4:1-8).

Moses lost the chance to enter the promised land for indulging in one temper outburst too many (Numbers 20:1-12).

David, a man after God's heart, got carried away in unbridled anger at times (II Samuel 8:1-2). It cost him the blessing of building the Temple (1 Chronicles 22:8).

James and John were rebuked by Christ for a vindictive, hardhearted attitude toward a despised group of people (Luke 9:51-56). They changed greatly later on (I John 4:20). So can we...."

So how do we overcome anger and control our tempers. There is a lot of advice available to us to help us in our quest in bringing our tempers under control. The first source that I'd like to quote on this subject is Charles Swindoll's aforementioned book "Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back". He writes:

Winning Over Anger

What do we do about anger? When it comes from a wrong motive, when we don't get our own way, when we act in haste—anger is sin. What practical things does God say about dealing with anger? Scripture offers four specific directives in the Book of Proverbs. Let's cover them quickly.

(1) Learn to ignore petty disagreements.

"A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, And it is his glory to overlook a transgression" (Prov. 19:11).

Perhaps it is better rendered in the Berkeley Version.

"It is prudent for a man to restrain his anger, it is his glory to overlook: an offence" (MLB).

In God's eyes, it is glory if you are big enough to overlook an offence. Don't look for a fight, Christian. Keep the chip off your shoulder. Don't be defensive about your point or your right. Be willing to give.

Proverbs 17:14 says essentially the same thing. I like this verse.

"The beginning of strife is like letting out water, So abandon the quarrel before it breaks out."

Just as in the tango, it takes two to quarrel. If you see that there is an angry disagreement coming, back off; leave it. Learn to ignore petty differences.

(2) Refrain from close association with anger-prone people. Don't hang around them.

"Do not associate with a man given to anger or go with a hot-tempered man lest you learn his ways and find a snare for yourself" (Prov. 22:24, 25).

It's true: We become like those we spend our time with. If you spend time with a rebel you will become rebellious and angry.

If I hang around people who are negative, you know what happens to me? I become negative. (And by nature, I'm a positive person.) But it's amazing—the more I'm around people who talk about how things won't work, and how this isn't good, and how even though there were ten very fine things, two things went wrong, the more I begin to think, 'You know, a lot of things are wrong.' Then I get petty and negative in other areas.

Are you becoming an angry person because you're associating closely with angry people? The Scripture says, 'Don't do it!'

(3) Keep very close check on your tongue. More than any slanderous event, any immoral act, any unwise financial dealings, that which breaks up a church quickest is an unchecked tongue. The longer I live, the more I realize that.

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, But a harsh word stirs up anger" (Prov. 15:1).

"He who guards his mouth and his tongue guards his soul from troubles" (Prov. 21:23).

Washington Irving made this statement:

"The only edged tool that gets sharper with use is the tongue."

It isn't your leg muscle that's the strongest muscle in your body; it's the muscle in your mouth. Control your tongue. It will literally "turn away wrath."

(4) Cultivate honesty in communication ... don't let anger build up. Take a close look at Proverbs 27:4-6:

"Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, but who can stand before jealousy? Better is open rebuke than love that is concealed. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but deceitful are the kisses of an enemy."

The New Testament counterpart to this passage is Ephesians 4:28:

"Therefore, laying aside falsehood, speak truth, each one of you, with his neighbour, for we are members of one another."

There is no substitute for total honesty, spoken in love. Allowing anger to seethe on the back burner will lead to a very large lid blowing off a very hot pot....

If you begin to implement these inspired principles, you might change your pattern to four steps forward and only one step back! (p.164-167)

Neil Earle completes his previously quoted article with these tips on conquering anger:

The way to overcome anger is to train ourselves, with God's help, to see the benefits in quickly forgiving offences.

We don't need to play amateur psychologist or engage in tedious confrontations that solve nothing. Instead, be more willing to forgive offences than the other party. Try to soften the rhetoric and keep it unemotional. Try to have Jesus' attitude of agreeing with the adversary quickly (Matthew 5:25).

This goes a long way in reducing conflict, that spirit of murder that seethes and festers inside. So many of our conflicts are unintentional or accidental. And if we believe that people are lying awake at night trying to make our life difficult, then we do have problems!

In most cases it just isn't so—life is usually much less complicated than that.

Learn to enjoy therapeutic talks with a close friend from time to time. Here, irritations or frustrations can be talked out in a nonthreatening environment. The Bible upholds this kind of friendship (Proverbs 17:17). What is a friend? 'Someone who knows all about you but likes you anyway,' a wise man answered.

One spin-off of a happy marriage is the emotional release from unburdening oneself of frustrations—a beautiful blessing in a good marriage, where each mate can act as trusted confidant, consoler and stabilizer...

Rather than destructively lashing out, it would be far better for us all to learn the biblical prescriptions for handling anger.

First, if possible, drop to your knees the moment you see resentment. Bitterness and anger welling up. Ask God to rebuke your wrong thoughts (II Corinthians 10:5). Remember: most anger is sin (James 1:20).

Second, see the big picture of human existence in mind. Ask yourself: Will this really matter 1,000 years from now? Suppose your adversary died, and you still had a grudge on your conscience. How would you feel then?

Third, try sincerely to see the other person's point of view. Where is he coming from? Remember the Indian motto: 'Help me not to speak evil of my brother till I have walked a day in his moccasins.'

Fourth, sow peace (James 3:18). Do you have an antagonist at odds with you? At the very least, if you are a true peacemaker (Matthew 5:9), you can be sorry that you and your adversary are having a problem. That attitude all by itself softens tensions. Why not send a gift, a card or some other small token of goodwill? Solomon said much about the wise use of gifts (Proverbs 17:8, 18:16).

Fifth, when in conflict review the points covered in this article and others like it in The Good News. Seek wise counsel. Cement in your mind how nonproductive anger is. See it as a sheer waste of time. Tell yourself you need all the clearheaded thinking you can muster. Why waste time going on the warpath'?

Sixth, consider this: Does God need us to police His universe? Do we really believe that people who offend us can violate God's laws with impunity? Read Psalm 73 and stay calm.

Seventh, pray for your adversary. At least then the problem will come up for review before the great God, and this will help far more than you think. You will be investing spiritual energies that can revitalize the relationship. This will soften your approach (Matthew 5:43-44). Since God loves both of you, His Holy Spirit will give you more objectivity toward your persecutor. God will enter the relationship if you ask Him (James 4:1-2).

With God's help we can master anger. And what a blessing if we do. Life is so short, and anger disrupts, dislocates and distracts us from the abundant life God wants us to have!

In their book "Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?" William Backus and Marie Chapien offer us these tips based on their counselling technique called Misbelief Therapy which identifies the lies about sin we are telling ourself and using the truth of the Bible to combat those lies. They offer the following advice:

Once we have brought our anger into the open, with the Holy Spirit's help, we can begin to make the needed changes. We need the work of the Holy Spirit within us to lead us into all truth. Jesus called (it) the 'Spirit of Truth.' He shows us that the misbegotten, misdirected sin of anger is based on lies.

In order to commit this sin, we must tell ourselves certain untruths such as it is all right to practice inordinate anger and remain angry. Jesus tells us not to let the sun set on our anger because He has given us the daily power to deal with our problems.

Let us examine the lies associated with anger so that we can recognize them immediately when they occur in our mind.

Misbelief: "Somebody or something else made me mad. My anger has nothing to do with personal responsibility. I'm mad and it's all their fault."

The belief that one's emotional state is caused by the environment is most prevalent in anger. It is related to a major untruth which says, "I am not worth much." Whenever somebody does something that we think we have the right to be angry about, we should search our misbeliefs. Maybe we are construing the other person as signalling a message that we are not important. If we are not important, that means we are no good. If we are not important and are no good, then we do have something to be upset about.

Consider the times your feelings have been hurt. You probably were telling yourself that it was terrible your value was not being appreciated. Somebody hadn't recognized your achievements or your positive attributes. Maybe they didn't say hello to you when they were supposed to, or didn't invite you to their party, or maybe they ignored you when you wanted their attention.

Next time you're offended and you become very angry, immediately ask yourself, "What am I telling myself? Am I telling myself that person must think I am not worth much and therefore I have the right to be angry?"

The last time you were upset and everybody around you was wondering what was wrong, did you even for a moment consider your attitude and behaviour sinful? You can behave in the most ugly, unloving manner and never realize it because you are firmly convinced you have every right to be upset.

Misbelief: "I have every right to get all upset when things go wrong." Why argue for the right to give yourself an ulcer? To drive up your blood pressure? Getting upset is not one of your basic inalienable rights.

Tell yourself you have the right to joy unspeakable instead of anger and misery. Your 'rights' include abundant life, peace, wisdom and joy. It is not the end of the world if you're not accepted by one and all.

Misbelief: "I can't cope when people don't accept me." It's nice to be accepted, but not always possible. It may be disagreeable and unpleasant not to be accepted, or unjustly criticized, but you will eventually recover. You may not like it, but you can still go on living very happily.

Misbelief: "Everyone should treat me the way I want them to." God has made it clear from the time you were a little tot in Sunday school, that you are going to live in a world where there are sinners—a lot of them. Even Christians may not always behave in an acceptable and approvable manner.

You will have rewarding relationships in your life once you exercise a new attitude toward people. When you allow others the right to make mistakes you will be easier to live with. When you drop your urge to control people and situations, you will find yourself more relaxed in your relationships. Others will sense your ease and acceptance and be drawn to you. Love and forgiveness are irresistible. You will tend to treat people well when you admire them, and they will reciprocate.

If you expect to be treated well, and your unspoken demands go unmet, you will become angry. Angry people are rarely respected or admired.

Misbelief: "I have a bad temper and I can't help it. I just can't control anger"
When you start telling yourself the truth—"I can control my behaviour"— you will find that you can be free of the bad habits you thought were in your very blood.

By telling yourself you can't control your anger, you open yourself to such lies as, "I can't control my eating (or drinking, or smoking, or whatever other bad habits I have)."

Unfortunately, your friends may respond to your destructive behaviour by accepting it. Then you're even worse off. 'Go ahead, Bill, you poor fellow,' they infer, 'you've got this genetic weakness with your temper and you just can't help it. That's all right, old boy, go right ahead and destroy yourself and everyone around you. You just can't help yourself.'

Sound ridiculous? Sad to say, millions of people are doing that very thing right now. Their friends stand by watching them go further and further into the quicksand of defeat and do nothing but smile dismally and wave as they sink. 'Poor old Max. Did you hear he had a heart attack? Poor guy. I'll bet it was because of that rotten temper he always had.' Anger can contribute to a multitude of physical problems. It can even be a contributing cause of premature death.

You cannot control and conquer anger by expressing rage, by screaming and hitting things, in order to show the world how you feel.

Destructive expression of anger by yelling, hitting or hurting someone is not acceptable in any circumstance. It is not a laughing matter when a child kicks his feet, juts out his little lower lip and acts out his temper [his misbelief being twofold, "I have the right to have a temper tantrum when things don't go the way I want them to," and "I should always get what I want"].

Mommy may giggle, "Oh, isn't little Billy adorable when he gets angry?" But this temper is not funny. Whether a person is five or ninety-five, if he screams in rage at those around him, he is under the false assumption that he is exclusive, that he does not have to learn to care about other people, or tell himself the truth even if he doesn't feel like it.

An adult slamming his fist against the wall is no different than the little child lying on the floor screaming and kicking his feet when he doesn't get what he wants. "Letting it all hang out" is not the answer. A person can control his temper—by controlling his misbeliefs.

You must bring your anger under control. Life or God or others owe you nothing. Neither does anyone make you angry. You make yourself angry.

Anger is sin when it is uncontrolled, destructively or maliciously vented or expressed. Denial and repression of anger aid sin because they are based on lies.

Anger is a simple emotion when it is expressed in conversation and when it is not allowed to go unattended. "Let not the sun go down upon your wrath" means you can be in charge of your feelings. You can live a fulfilling life with your emotions under your control (p.84-88).

Many of us have struggled with having a bad temper. A good example of this is the former tennis player John McEnroe. His outbursts became legendary. Why was there so much anger that came out whenever he felt wronged?

He took those real or supposed wrongs far too seriously. Such anger is very closely connected to selfishness - a desire to always have things go your way.

He lacked tolerance when he was “wronged”. We need a graciousness to accept things when circumstances go against us.

We often tend to be more irritable and more prone to losing our temper when deep down we’re not all that happy with how our life is going. Those negative feelings towards the state of our life can easily play into Satan’s hands needing little to trigger off an outburst of anger. To counter this we need to have a more positive attitude toward life which can be developed by developing faith in God’s ability to work things out in our life.

We should consciously focus our minds on positive things (Phil. 4:8) to help develop a more positive attitude towards life which will help counteract irritability and help make us less prone to losing our temper.

Anger should not be repressed. When people hurt us over and over that anger can build up to the point that we end up exploding to either the person who wronged us or some innocent bystander. If we just hold it all in it can eat away at us emotionally and physically through any number of stress-related illnesses. Paul tells us not to let the sun go down on our anger. When the timing is right we need to go to the person who has offended us and express our displeasure at their actions and if they repent we should forgive them. The principles in Matthew 18 about going to your brother should be followed to deal with the anger we feel when we are wronged.

The antidote to anger is the fruit of God’s spirit we know as patience. Patience is the ability to stay calm and in control for a long time, especially when things go wrong. The following is from an article by Norman Shoaf entitled “How to Develop Godly Patience” which appeared in the October-November 1981 Good News magazine. Shoaf gives us some tips on how to develop patience in our life:

Here, then, are several ways to develop godly patience.

- **Keep your eye on the overall goal.** All of us are forced to deal with trials and problems. When we’re trying to reason with unconverted mates or striving to please unfair bosses or struggling to make financial ends meet, it’s sometimes hard to keep our minds on our ultimate destiny — birth into God’s Family and co-rulership, with Jesus Christ, of the universe.

But that’s exactly what we must do - keep our minds on that great, overall goal. James wrote that Christians should focus on, and conduct their lives in expectation of Christ’s Second Coming and the Kingdom of God:

”Be patient therefore, brethren. unto the coming of the Lord.... Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh” (Jas. 5:7-8).

The most important thing on God’s mind right now is the restoration of His government to this earth and the eventual establishment of His Kingdom throughout the universe. And that has always been His goal. But consider that a thousand years to God is like a mere day (Ps. 90:4) — consider the great patience of

God! We are to emulate that patience in constantly looking forward to God's Kingdom.

“For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie: though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry” (Hab. 2:3).

- **Think before you act.** There is an old saying that “fools rush in where angels fear to tread.” A person who jumps to conclusions is likely to end up at the bottom of a cliff.

Your husband or wife made an unkind remark to you? Don't snap back with something you'll later be sorry you said. Rather, concentrate on glorifying God. You're sick and tired of standing in line at a church function or at the Feast of Tabernacles?

Occupy your mind with something else! Don't dwell on your consternation about the long line, or you'll end up saying or doing something that will set a wrong example of God's way of life.

- **Concentrate on giving.** Impatience is many times rooted in selfishness.

Paul said, “Be patient toward all men” (I Thess. 5:14) - the bank teller, the small child who can't understand an instruction, the gas station attendant, the person who drones on and on with the most boring story you ever heard.

Overlook the shortcoming others (you may have a few of own). Forget yourself and be concerned with their welfare. “The patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit” (Eccl. 7:8).

Sincerely love the other person and look upon him as a future God - it will drastically change your perspective.

- **Talk out tensions.** Does a mate, a fellow employee or a friend have an annoying habit that is about to drive you up the wall? Well, if you simply cannot overlook it any longer tell the person about it and talk out your feelings.

In almost every case the other person will not have even realized his habit bothered you, and will make an effort to stop, if you approach him with tact, meekness and sincere concern.

Ask God to grant you favour in his eyes. Don't let the impatience and resentment build up inside you until you explode into rage or retaliate some way— you would certainly not be setting an example of godly control or patience then.

- **Rely on God for strength.** Our Father in heaven is the very God of patience, and He can help you have a mind like His (Rom.15:5). When you think you're at the end of rope -- you just can't grin and bear it any longer - ask God for more His Holy Spirit — His strength.

GREED

The fourth deadly sin is that of greed. There is a right and wrong desire to have more possessions and other things in life. The wrong desire to have more is what we call greed. Greed refuses to be denied anything it wants to possess.

Greed is where we want too much, where we want to have more at the expense of others, where we want more than we can reasonably afford and where we are obsessed with possessions much more than character growth and building good relationships with people.

For their expert comments on the subject of greed I'd like to quote again from "Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?" by William Backus and Marie Chapien. They write:

The deadly sin of greed has one lie upon which hinge all others. That lie is, "Having 'X' would be good for me and I must have it." Greed tells me that whatever my eye takes a fancy to should belong to me because it would be good to have it. I believe I can never be happy unless I have 'X'.

Each of the seven deadly sins requires the lie that sin holds some benefit for us. However, sin holds no benefits, only curses. Ahab's greedy lusting after Naboth's vineyard is a good example. His greed caused him to murder. Once he had the vineyard, he was still unhappy, and he and his family were destroyed. No matter what we gain out of greedy motives, we will never know true peace and joy in our achievements. Peace and joy come directly go from the heart of God through the Spirit of God. They are the fruit of the pure and holy heart. When we plant holy seeds, we get holy fruit. Greed has no place here.

How to Recognize Greed

You are greedy if:

- You become undone and miserable after losing even the smallest amount of money.**
- You become very disturbed when after having bought an item you discover you could have purchased it cheaper somewhere else.**
- You receive an inordinate amount of pleasure handling and counting money.**
- When the store forgets to bill you for an amount you owe, you do nothing about it.**
- You make plans for securing a job that pays a lot of money rather than a job you find interesting and rewarding.**
- You feel that paying income tax is robbery and so you cheat at tax time.**
- You feel sick when somebody else buys something you want but can't afford.**

- You feel uneasy around people who are better off than you and tell yourself it's because they're "snobs" and you are "just plain folk."

- When the conversation turns to what someone has recently purchased, you always tell of your recent purchases.

- You have a catalogue (your "wish book") and you drool with longing every time you look at its expensive and luxurious items.

- You often drive through neighbourhoods better than yours and yearn to live in one of those exclusive homes.

- When you give something away, you want to be sure your generosity will be reciprocated.

- When you go to a buffet-style restaurant, you feel obliged to eat until you can hardly stand up because the sign says, "All You Can Eat," and you want your money's worth.

A recent article in Time magazine says Americans are buying \$1,300 worth of merchandise on credit for every \$1,000 they earn. How do we explain this kind of behaviour? Are we naive? Anyone who knows arithmetic is aware that if we spend \$1,300 when we've only got \$1,000, we're headed for trouble. Do we excuse this behaviour by saying we're obsessive compulsives and don't know what we're doing? Shall we tell ourselves we just can't help ourselves? Of course not. The problem is greed.

Possessions for Possessions' Sake

Examples of greed and covetousness are simple enough to see. Owning things for their own sake is coveting. The greedy person just plain wants to have it all. The greedy person craves possessions and more possessions just for possessions' sake.

Have you ever had a collection of anything? Don't worry, collecting things does not mean you are riddled with the sin of greed. Many people are collectors. Maybe you save string or paper bags for future use; that is probably not greed. Collecting becomes greed only if you save things you will never use because you just can't bear to throw them away.

How about a hobby—collecting things that are important to you such as stamps, art, antique books, or anything you really like. Such collections will reflect greed only if you find yourself enslaved to them by hoarding and anxiously competing with somebody else's collection.

In Moliere's play *The Miser*, the main character is Harpigon, whose name is derived from the Greek word *harpe* meaning 'claw.' He is a caricature of the greedy person whose claws rip at the world, tearing and clamouring to get things for himself. This is actually idolatry. The Bible teaches us to keep ourselves from idols. If we view what we own and find that we have made a god out of our stamp collection or fine china or flower garden or stock portfolio, we must repent of idolatry.

First Tim. 6:10 says, "For the love of money is the root of all evil: which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows."

All of the seven deadly sins are roots of evil. It is in this sense that evil causes suffering, hurt and pain. If you are caught up in one or all of these sins, you and others will suffer. Sin comes with destruction as standard equipment. God does not stand on a distant cloud with a big club waiting to get us every time we feel greedy. He is a God of love who gently guides us into truth so that we can live happily, free of the sorrow and agonies which sin brings. We punish ourselves with sorrow when we sin.

If greed is one of your problems, you can teach yourself new behaviours which will lead to joy and freedom from sin. This happened to Charles Dickens' Scrooge. Scrooge exemplified the deadly sin of greed, and he was certainly an unhappy man. He was rich enough to have anything a man could want, including a successful business and a loving family, but he was utterly miserable and lonely.

Do not confuse the sin of greed with the sin of envy; they are very different. If I envy you for what you have, I want what you have only because it's yours and not mine. As soon as I have it, I am not very interested in it. The items I want are fascinatingly and obsessively important to me only if you own them. My own possessions are not very valuable to me simply because they are mine. What you own is valuable to me because it seems more important.

Greed is like a claw. It digs in its nails and pulls toward oneself and possesses. Greed or covetousness is the excessive love of possessing things with the intent to have them and hold them to oneself. The key word in greed, as in anger, is inordinate, or out of order.

God knows what is good for us, what is "in order." He knows how to keep us from suffering and want. He does not provide for each of us exactly the same. Sometimes we will experience hard times in order to learn not to set our hearts on the treasures of earth.

If we are trusting God we can see that greed is as debilitating as a disease. Jesus tells us, 'Take no thought for the morrow.' Greed is not only taking thought for tomorrow, but hoarding for tomorrow. The greedy person will begin to worry about the next meal even before he has finished the one he is eating.

The Holy Squeeze

God always prospers His children. If we set our heart on God, we will prosper. If we set our heart on prospering, we may become greedy and envious.

A minister friend of ours was once in a financial squeeze because his income was irregular. He could hardly make ends meet from one check to another. He told the Lord, "I can't understand why this is happening to me. If you would prosper me, I wouldn't have to spend so much time praying about paying these bills. Just think of all the time I could spend helping people and serving you better."

He now tells of the great lesson he learned when the Lord answered him and said, "Now, my son, you are really learning how to pray!"

If you find yourself in a "squeeze" bless it. It could be your holy squeeze. Gain all you can from it. Many times when a Christian is in financial trouble, instead of using the experience for the glory of God and learning the lessons of prayer, he or she will slip into greed and envy. Our minister friend could have resorted to such feelings. He could have observed other ministers with large, financially successful ministries and felt jealous. He could have coveted their success. But covetousness would have contaminated his ministry.

The [tenth] commandment, "Thou shalt not covet..." means we can not ache for anything our neighbour has, including his spouse, servants, livestock or possessions. This commandment tells us to stop wishing longingly that we could have a coat like Mrs. Smith's coat, and it also tells you to stop groaning about Joe's thick, curly hair if yours is thin and wispy. If we tell ourselves we've just got to have what they've got, we're coveting and in for much unhappiness and discontent.

Is Desire Wrong?

We must discern greed from desire. Desire is a gift from God. Life without desire is a dull and futile life; psychologists say that without desire a person will not even get out of bed in the morning. Without desire, life stops.

The commandments against greed and covetousness are not against the natural desires within us which have been created by God himself. The commandments speak against warped desires, not godly desires and motives.

It is perfectly legitimate to desire a nice home, a new dining room table, shrubs along the driveway, new clothes, a better job, or a car that runs smoothly. There is no inherent sin in desiring these things. Even to desire something that belongs to another person does not mean we are covetous and hopelessly lost in greed. If we are walking through a parking lot and see a new car and think, Oh, I'd love to have a car like that, we have not sinned. The desire becomes sin when we tell ourselves, "I've got to have that car." Sin occurs when our thoughts center solely around that car; when we begin to plan how we are going to get that car no matter what; when we fantasize about how essential it is to possess that car.

Greed refuses to be denied the thing it wants to possess. Desire, on the other hand, is not troubled by the lack of that thing.

Greed and Irritability

When you receive a letter in the mail from a Christian ministry asking for money, do you get irritated? When you open a letter that begins, "Dear Christian Friend, we need your help..." do you grumble, "Don't they know I'm not made of money?"

When your pastor preaches on stewardship and tithing, do you sigh, "Oh, no. Here it comes. They're going to take another offering?"

Do you argue with your siblings about who pays the most to care for your aging parents?

Do you feel imposed upon every time one of your children asks for money to buy something?

Do you resent the purchases your wife wants to make and insist upon controlling the finances yourself, even to the point of buying her clothes for her?

Would losing a \$20 bill ruin your day?

The deadly sin of greed is often excused by others because sometimes it sounds acceptable. If a person brags at a party about the profits acquired on his stock certificates and investments, he is considered smart, not greedy. Because greed can appear as "smart," "thrifty," "economical" or "clever," a person can be suffering from its sorrows without even knowing why he is so unhappy and dissatisfied...

Conquering Greed

The fundamental untruth behind greed is, "Having X would be good for me and I ought to have it. I cannot stand not having . If I don't have it, I can never be happy. If I lose it, my life will be ruined. I must have what I want."

You can stop considering it a tragedy that you do not have what somebody else has. You are only kidding yourself when you tell yourself possessions will make you feel better or that owning something someone else has will make you more important. God says you already are important.

Jesus came to set you free from the many sorrows of sin. The sin of greed can bring much sorrow.

When you find yourself tempted to covet what somebody else has, or to feel depressed at the happy news of someone else's blessings, tell yourself immediately: "I do not need to have what someone else has. I can survive without the possessions, recognition, achievement, and talents of other people. I can be happy without them. I do not have to have, be, or do what somebody else has, is or does. I can be perfectly happy with less than others. I can be completely content with me."(p.89-98)

Greed is an excessive desire for possessions and intangible things such as power and other things. Greed is one manifestation of a greater problem called selfishness where we want our own way and we'll do whatever we want irregardless of how it impacts and hurts others. The following is from the Handbook of Bible Application in their section on selfishness. We read:

"When a country is rebellious, it has many rulers, but a man of understanding and knowledge maintains order" (Proverbs 28:2, NIV).

Selfishness separates us from God and from others. For a government or a society to endure, it needs wise, informed leaders—and these are hard to find. 'It has many rulers' may mean that anarchy is prevailing. Each person's selfishness quickly affects others. A selfish employee who steals from his company ruins its

productivity. A selfish driver who drinks before taking the wheel makes the roads unsafe. A selfish spouse who has an adulterous affair often breaks up two families. When enough people live for themselves with little concern for how their actions affect others, the resulting moral rot contaminates the entire nation. Are you part of the problem ... or the solution?

"Your attitude toward me has been proud and arrogant', says the Lord. 'But you say, 'What do you mean? What have we said that we shouldn't?' Listen; you have said, 'It is foolish to worship God and obey him. What good does it do to obey his laws, and to sorrow and mourn for our sins? From now on, as far as we're concerned, 'Blessed are the arrogant. For those who do evil shall prosper, and those who dare God to punish them shall get off scot-free.'" (Malachi 3:13-15, TLB)

Selfishness is a rejection of God and all he represents. These verses describe the people's arrogant attitude toward God. When we ask, "What good does it do to serve God?" we are really asking, "What good does it do for me?" Our focus is selfish. Our real question should be, "What good does it do for God?" We must serve God just because he is God and deserves to be served.

"And how does a man benefit if he gains the whole world and loses his soul in the process? For is anything worth more than his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37, TLB)

Selfishness is ultimately self-destructive. Many people spend all their energy seeking pleasure. Jesus said, however, that a world of pleasure centred on possessions, position, or power is ultimately worthless. Whatever you have on earth is only temporary; it cannot be exchanged for your soul. If you work hard at getting what you want, you might eventually have a "pleasurable" life, but in the end you will find it hollow and empty.

Are you willing to make the pursuit of God more important than the selfish pursuit of pleasure? Follow Jesus, and you will know what it means to live abundantly now and to have eternal life as well.

"And even when you do ask you don't get it because your whole aim is wrong—you want only what will give you pleasure." (James 4:3, TLB)

Selfishness is at the heart of most problems between people. Conflicts and disputes among believers are always harmful. James explains that these quarrels result from evil desires battling within us—we want more possessions, more money, higher status, more recognition. When we want badly enough to fulfill these desires, we fight in order to do so. Instead of aggressively grabbing what we want, we should submit ourselves to God, ask God to help us get rid of our selfish desires, and trust him to give us what we really need.(p.562-563)

SLOTH

Deadly sin number five is that of sloth, which is an old English word for laziness. **Laziness is that trait of avoiding or being disinclined to work.**

The Handbook of Bible Application offers the following comments about laziness. We read:

“We hear that some of you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat.” (2 Thessalonians 3:11-12, NIV)

The return of Christ is a motivation for diligence, not laziness. Some people in the Thessalonian church were falsely teaching that because Christ would return any day, people should set aside their responsibilities, quit work, do no future planning, and just wait for the Lord. But their lack of activity only led them into sin. They became a burden to the church, which was supporting them; they wasted time that could have been used for helping others; and they became ‘bustybodies’ (3:11).

These church members may have thought that they were being more spiritual by not working, but Paul tells them to be responsible and get back to work. Being ready for Christ means obeying him in every area of life. Because we know that Christ is coming, we must live in such a way that our faith answer daily practice will please him when he arrives.

There is an appropriate place for rest and relaxation. Paul was writing here about the person who is lazy. Paul explained that when he and his companions were in Thessalonica, they worked hard, buying what they needed rather than becoming a burden to any of the believers. The rule they followed was, “If a man will not work, he shall not eat.”

There's a difference between leisure and laziness. Relaxation and recreation provide a necessary and much needed balance to our lives; but when it is time to work, Christians should jump right in. We should make the most of our talent and time, doing all we can to provide for ourselves and our dependents. Rest when you should be resting, and work when you should be working.

Persistent laziness should not be permitted. Paul counselled the church to stop supporting financially and associating with those who persisted in their idleness. Hunger and loneliness can be very effective ways to make the idle person become productive. Paul was not advising coldness or cruelty, but the kind of tough love that a person would show a brother or sister.

“Dear friends, while you are waiting for these things to happen and for him to come, try hard to live without sinning; and be at peace with everyone so that he will be pleased with you when he returns.” (2 Peter 3:14, TLB)

Obedience is true preparation for Christ's coming. We should not become lazy and complacent because Christ has not yet returned. Instead, we should live in eager expectation of his coming. What would you like to be doing when Christ returns? That is how you should be living each day.(p.376-377)

Charles Swindoll in his very fine book “Active Spirituality” has two small chapters on the subjects of Diligence and Industriousness, synonyms which are both the

opposite and antidote of laziness. Charles Swindoll in those chapters gives us these insights to the subject of laziness:

Diligence and industry are qualities that make projects successful, yet we all have a tendency to procrastinate.

“Procrastinate: To put off intentionally and habitually, postpone...to put off... reprehensibly the doing of something that should be done.” — Webster's Seventh New Collegiate Dictionary

Thanks, Webster.

Not that we needed a definition, but sometimes it helps to nail things down. When we procrastinate, we deliberately say “later” but usually think “never”. It's the manana syndrome: “Someday, we gotta get organised.” Which, being interpreted, is really saying, “Who cares if it ever gets done?” People who procrastinate have no definite plans to accomplish the objective. They simply push it into the slimy ooze of indefiniteness, that murky swamp where the thought of good intentions slips in over its head.

Do you need to learn more diligence? Do you really want to put feet to your active spirituality? Then Solomon's sayings to the rescue!

First off, Solomon assures us that we have all the mental equipment we need to do the deed.

“The plans of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the Lord” (16:1).

That ability to plan is unique to mankind. “Orderly thinking” (16:1, MEB) is ours and ours alone. We have a built-in capacity to think things through—to plan things out. Horses don't. Rabbits can't. Chickens won't. But you and I can and should.

Second, Solomon affirms we can also have the desire to get the thing done.

“Commit your works to the Lord, and your plans will be established’ (16:3).

We even have divine assistance available. But please don't kid yourself; this is not automatic. A desire doesn't guarantee accomplishment. I recall another saying of Solomon:

“The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is made fat” (13:4).

Deep within our beings rest rival foes: Sluggard vs. Diligence. The fight is on. Both have desires, you understand. Even Sluggard “craves”, but he accomplishes zilch. He doesn't follow through. He postpones: “Maybe someday”.

But Diligence?

“The plans of the diligent lead surely to advantage, But everyone who is hasty comes surely to poverty” (21:5).

Then why don't we always overrule Sluggard and give the nod to Diligence? Why do we opt for procrastination more often than not? I have thought about that a lot (even while sitting here, realising I needed to get at it). Here are my conclusions:

- Either we set goals that were unwise or unrealistic or
- We attempted to do something that was not God's will or
- We allowed Sluggard to win when he arm-wrestled Diligence!

So? Surprisingly, Solomon says we need to take a trip out to an anthill. In fact, God commands us to!

“Go to the ant, O sluggard, Observe her ways and be wise, which, having no chief, officer or ruler, prepares her food in the summer, and gathers her provision in the harvest. How long will you lie down, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep?” (6:6-10)

Ouch! I find it more than a little humiliating to think of standing six feet above a tiny insect and being told to bend down and learn from its ways. But what lessons the ant teaches us! Those tiny pedagogues model several valuable messages:

They don't need some superintendent over them. They get the essentials done first. They work ahead of time so they can relax later. They do it all without fanfare or applause.

What happens if we fail to follow the ant's example?

- We continue to procrastinate.
- We begin to resemble 'a vagabond'.
- We ultimately become dependent on others.

Furthermore, we miss one of life's most delightful rewards, which Solomon describes in these words:

“Hope deferred makes the heart sick, but desire fulfilled is a tree of life....Desire realised is sweet to the soul” (Prov. 13:12, 19).

Our hearts get “sick” when we keep putting our hope on hold. What is it that is so “sweet to the soul”? Accomplishment. For example:

- A garage cleaned spick and span.
- The storm windows attached before winter's first blast. Those twenty pounds gone from our bodies.
- The whole yard mowed trimmed. The room addition finished (yes, that includes paint!).
- A car waxed.
- A new dress made.
- Pictures labelled and placed in the photo album.
- The chapter written!....(p.114-118)

Mankind benefits from work and industriousness. They are what has enabled us to create great civilizations. Many people, however, live under the false impression that work is a curse. Many others dream of being free from having to work. Some even attempt to quote Scripture to verify their position that work was the sad consequence of Adam's fall in the Garden of Eden. Wrong!

Before sin ever entered the human race while total innocence prevailed—Adam was assigned the task of cultivating the Garden (Gen. 2:15). Work is not a curse. The curse that followed the Fall had to do with the hassles—the thorn- and thistle-like irritations that now accompany one's work—not work itself. Work, alone, is a privilege, a challenge to indolence, an answer to boredom, and a place to invest one's energy—not to mention to provide for our physical needs. And make no mistake about it, active spirituality takes work.

Throughout the Bible we are encouraged to be industrious, to be people of diligence, committed to the tasks in life that need to be accomplished. Some, however, do not consider this a privilege, but a drag. For those folks, the idea that spiritual growth is hard is an attractive option. Therefore, let's snap on our zoom lens and focus on this practical reality.

Of all the Scriptures that address the issue of laziness, none are more eloquent than the sayings of Solomon. Among the terms he uses for the lazy, 'sluggard' seems to be his favourite. When I trace my way through the Proverbs, I find no less than six characteristics of the sluggard.

1. The sluggard has trouble getting started:

"How long will you lie down, O sluggard?
When will you arise from your sleep?
'A little sleep, a little slumber,
A little folding of the hands to rest'—
And your poverty will come in like a vagabond,
And your need like an armed man." (6:9-11)

You may remember that in chapter twelve we discussed the active spirituality of diligence, so there is no need to repeat what was presented in that study. Nevertheless, there is no getting around it: laziness focuses on the obstacles, the excuses that loom large on the front end of a task. Those who are lazy just can't seem to roll up their sleeves and plunge in full bore.

2. The sluggard is restless: He (or she) may have desires, but the trouble comes in implementing them:

"The soul of the sluggard craves and gets nothing, but the soul of the diligent is made fat" (13:4).

"The desire of the sluggard puts him to death, for his hands refuse to work; All day long he is craving, while the righteous gives and does not hold back" (21:25-26).

It is not uncommon for the lazy to be extremely skilled, creative people. They can talk and dream and even sketch out the game plan, but the discipline of pursuit is lacking. As we just read, the "craving" goes on "all day long", but little gets

accomplished. When it comes to the sluggard's getting off dead centre and getting the job done, forget it.

3. The sluggard takes a costly toll on others:

"He also who is slack in his work is brother to him who destroys" (18:9).

That last word, "destroys", pulsates with liabilities. A lazy employee doesn't simply hold an organization back, he destroys its motivation and drive. A lazy player doesn't just weaken the team, he destroys its spirit and diminishes its will to win. A lazy pastor doesn't merely limit a church, he destroys its enthusiasm, its passion to win souls and meet needs. Before long, everyone must do more to compensate for the sluggard's negative influence.

4. The sluggard is usually defensive:

"The sluggard is wiser in his own eyes than seven men who can give a discreet answer" (26:16).

Can't you just hear it—all those rationalizing comments? Unfortunately, it is this clever ability to cover up or explain away that keeps the lazy person from coming to terms with reality.

5. The sluggard is a quitter:

"A slothful man does not roast his prey, but the precious possession of a man is diligence" (12:27).

In this saying, there is the telltale mark of laziness: an absence of thoroughness.

- He likes to catch fish, but not to clean them.
- He loves to eat, but don't expect him to help with the dishes.
- He can add a room onto the house, but getting it painted is another story.
- He'd rather sleep than work; he'd rather focus on why something can't be helped, then blame the government for not caring (see Prov. 19:15).

6. The sluggard lives by excuses:

"The sluggard says, 'There is a lion outside; I shall be slain in the streets!' "(22:13)

That saying always makes me smile. Those lions in the street are nothing more than a fertile imagination gone to seed. The 'lion' returns . . .

"The sluggard says, 'There is a lion in the road! A lion is in the open square!' As the door turns on its hinges, so does the sluggard on his bed. The sluggard buries his hand in the dish; he is weary of bringing it to his mouth again" (26:13-15).

If it weren't so tragic, the analogy of a sluggard on a bed resembling a door on a hinge would be hilarious!

On the road to active spirituality, no one ever automatically or instantaneously overcame laziness. If you desire to be more industrious, today is the best day to

start a new direction. The best place to start is by admitting it if you are lazy . . . Stop covering it up. I dare you!

A young fellow rushed into a petrol station to use the pay phone. The manager overheard his telephone conversation as he asked:

“Sir, could you use a hardworking, honest young man to work for you? (pause) Oh ... you've already got a hardworking, honest young man? Well, thanks anyway!”

The boy hung up the phone with a smile. Humming to himself, he began to walk away, obviously happy.

“How can you be so cheery?” asked the eavesdropping service-station manager. “I thought the man you talked to already had someone and didn't want to hire you.”

The young fellow answered, “Well, you see I am the hardworking young man. I was just checking up on my job!”

If you called your boss, disguised your voice, and asked about your job, what do you think would be the boss's answer?

Or think about this. What if you could “ring up” God, disguise yourself, and ask Him what He thought of your diligence in pursuing the active spiritual life? What do you think He would say?(p.130-136)

LUST

The sixth deadly sin is, arguably, the hardest of all to overcome. We know it as lust. I say it is arguably the most difficult of all for a few reasons. Most men know of the incredible power of sexual temptations that this world throws at us from all angles.

Lust has destroyed many a man, including many men of God. That said, we have to remember that it is not just a male problem only as it takes two to tango. When God lists group of sins in the New Testament you will find adultery and fornication are often the first sins that God lists.

To start off with our study into the subject of lust I'd like to quote from the Handbook of Bible Application and its section on the subject of sex. We read:

INAPPROPRIATE SEX

Why does God put limits on our sexual expression?

“If a man is discovered committing adultery, both he and the other man's wife must be killed; in this way evil will be cleansed from Israel” (Deuteronomy 22:22, TLB).

Sexual sin is powerful and destructive. Why does God have so many laws about sexual sins? Instructions about sexual behaviour would have been vital for 3 million

people on a forty-year camping trip. But they would be equally important when they entered the promised land and settled down as a nation.

Paul, in Colossians 3:5-8, recognizes the importance of strong rules about sex for believers, because sexual sins have the power to disrupt and destroy the church. Sins involving sex are not innocent babblings in forbidden pleasures, as is so often portrayed, but powerful destroyers of relationships. They bring confusion and tear down the climate of respect, trust, and credibility so essential for solid marriages and secure children.

“But the man who commits adultery is an utter fool, for he destroys his own soul.” (Proverbs 6:32, TLB)

Sexual sin begins with desire and ends in tragedy. Regard lust as a warning sign of danger ahead. When you notice that you are attracted to a person of the opposite sex or preoccupied with thoughts of him or her, your desires may lead you to sin. Ask God to help you change your desires before you are drawn into sin.

Sex outside marriage always hurts somebody. Some people argue that it is all right to break God's law against sexual sin if nobody gets hurt.

In truth, somebody always gets hurt. Spouses are devastated. Children are scarred. The partners themselves, even if they escape disease and unwanted pregnancy, lose their ability to fulfill commitments, to feel sexual desire, to trust, and to be entirely open with another person.

God's laws are not arbitrary. They do not forbid good, clean fun; rather, they warn us against destroying ourselves through unwise actions or running ahead of God's time

“That is why I say to run from sex sin. No other sin affects the body as this one does. When you sin this sin it is against your own body.” (1 Corinthians 6:18, TLB)

The power of sexual sin must never be underestimated. Sexual immorality is a temptation that is always before us. In movies and on television, sex outside marriage is treated as a normal, even desirable, part of life, while marriage is often shown as confining and joyless. We can even be looked down on by others if we are suspected of being pure.

But God does not forbid sexual sin just to be difficult. He knows its power to destroy us physically and spiritually. It has devastated countless lives and destroyed families, churches, communities, and even nations.

God wants to protect us from damaging ourselves and others. and so he offers to fill us—our loneliness, our desires—with Himself.

Sexual sin is destructive even when the effects are not immediately apparent. Christians are free to be all they can be for God, but they are not free from God. God created sex to be a beautiful and essential ingredient of marriage, but sexual sin—sex outside the marriage relationship—always hurts someone.

It hurts God because it shows that we prefer following our own desires instead of the leading of the Holy Spirit. It hurts others because it violates the

commitment so necessary to a relationship. It often brings disease to our body. And it deeply affects our personality, which responds in anguish when we harm ourself physically and spiritually.

Christians do not have the right to use their body as they wish. What did Paul mean when he said that our body belongs to God? Many people say they have the right to do whatever they want with their own body. Although they think that this is freedom, they are really enslaved to their own desires. When we become Christians, the Holy Spirit fills us and lives in us. Therefore, we no longer own our body.

“For God has bought you with a great price” refers to slaves purchased at auction. Christ’s death freed us from sin, but also obligates us to his service. If you live in a building owned by someone else, you try not to violate the building’s rules. Because your body belongs to God, you must not violate his standards for living.

“But I say: Anyone who even looks at a woman with lust in his eye has already committed adultery with her in his heart.” (Matthew 5:28, TLB)

Sexual sin begins in the mind - God considers mental adultery as serious as physical adultery. The Old Testament law said that it is wrong for a person to have sex with someone other than his or her spouse (Exodus 20:14). But Jesus said that the desire to have sex with someone other than your spouse is mental adultery and thus sin. Jesus emphasized that if the act is wrong, then so is the intention.

To be faithful to your spouse with your body but not your mind is to break the trust so vital to a strong marriage. Jesus is not condemning natural interest in the opposite sex or even healthy sexual desire, but the deliberate and repeated filling of one’s mind with fantasies that would be evil if acted out. Lust must not be an excuse for sexual sin.

Some think that if lustful thoughts are sin, why shouldn't a person go ahead with the lustful actions too? Acting out sinful desires is harmful in several ways:

- (1) it causes people to excuse sin rather than to stop sinning;**
- (2) it destroys marriages;**
- (3) it is deliberate rebellion against God's Word; and**
- (4) it always hurts someone else in addition to the sinner.**

Sinful action is more dangerous than sinful desire, and that is why desires should not be acted out.

Nevertheless, sinful desire is just as damaging to righteousness. Left unchecked, wrong desires will result in wrong actions and turn people away from God.

APPROPRIATE SEX

Why should we follow God's laws about sex?

“Be happy, yes, rejoice in the wife of your youth.” (Proverbs 5:18, TLB)

Sex is a gift God gives to married people for their mutual enjoyment. God does not intend faithfulness in marriage to be boring, lifeless, pleasureless, and dull. Real happiness comes when we decide to find pleasure in the relationship God has given or will give us and to commit ourself to making it pleasurable for our spouse.

The real danger is in doubting that God knows and cares for us. We then may resent his timing and carelessly pursue sexual pleasure without his blessing.

“So do not refuse these rights to each other. The only exception to this rule would be the agreement of both husband and wife to refrain from the rights of marriage for a limited time, so that they can give themselves more completely to prayer. Afterwards, they should come together again so that Satan won't be able to tempt them because of their lack of self-control.” (1 Corinthians 7:5, TLB)...

Sexuality is a natural, God-given desire. Sexual temptations are difficult to withstand because they appeal to the normal and natural desires that God has given us.

Marriage provides God's way to satisfy these natural sexual desires and to strengthen the partners against temptation. Married couples have the responsibility to care for each other. Therefore, husbands and wives should not withhold themselves sexually from one another, but should fulfill each other's needs and desires.

God, as the creator of sex, ought to be our guide in the use of sexuality. Spiritually, our body belongs to God when we become a Christian, because Jesus Christ bought us by paying the price to release us from sin (see 6:19-20). Physically, our body belongs to our spouse because God designed marriage so that, through the union of husband and wife, the two become one (Genesis 2:24). Paul stressed complete equality in sexual relationships. Neither male nor female should seek dominance or autonomy.

“For God wants you to be holy and pure and to keep clear of all sexual sin so that each of you will marry in holiness and honour—not in lustful passion as the heathen do, in their ignorance of God and his ways.” (I Thessalonians 4:3-5, TLB)

To keep from hurting ourself, sexual desires and activities must be placed under Christ's control. God created sex for procreation and pleasure, and as an expression of love between a husband and wife. Sexual experience must be limited to the marriage relationship to avoid hurting ourself, our relationship to God, and our relationships with others.(p.568-571)

To finish this section on the subject of lust I'd like to quote again from “Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?” by William Backus and Marie Chapien. They write:

Paul Wilson, in his book, *The Institution of Marriage*, says, ‘[Marriage] was a divine plan and a Godgiven provision for His creatures—man. He who would corrupt this union is guilty of affront to God, and he who despises the relationship despises God who gave it.’ Lust outside of the marriage or within the marriage corrupts the marriage union.

Jesus taught that lust is not just a physical transgression, it is a defilement of the heart and soul. Satan will always try to plant evil ideas in your mind, no matter how good and moral you are. You will be tempted to lust after someone God has not given to you and you will succumb to the temptation if you are not actively employing the truth in your belief system....

When the sin of lust runs free, some of the misbeliefs in residence are, "I am not hurting anybody by what I do," and "I deserve something good and so I'll take what I think is good." These are what Potiphar's wife believed as she tried to unleash her lust on Joseph (Gen. 39). He was busy minding his business, managing the house of Potiphar while she was fantasizing about and lusting after him. She finally propositioned Joseph.

He recognized immediately the lies of lust and responded, "How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" Joseph was determined to hold to God's truth....

Lust can brew and foment in your mind where you think nobody can see. Eventually it will snare you and you will find yourself taking action on your thoughts.

When Satan lulls you into daydreaming about sex, remember how Jesus fought the devil's lies. He countered the lie with the truth: "It is written...." Isaiah wrote, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee..." (Isa. 26:3). Joseph's choice established his moral character forever. Jesus will give you the power to stay true; He will bless your faithfulness as you refuse the lies of Satan and choose the truth.

Love vs. Lust

The craving which lust implies is often romanticized and called love. Popular music and literature is replete with such "love." Refusal to face our sins, as we have discussed before, leads to neurotic behaviour. Many couples are married because of a fear of committing sexual sin outside of marriage. This is not love. The couple becomes physically attracted to one another and develop their appetites and desires for a sexual relationship. When this appetite and desire goes out of control and the desire becomes master, it is called lust, not love.

In Matthew 5, Jesus identifies lust as the basis of distorted sexuality. He says that looking at a person lustfully is equivalent to the act of adultery (vv. 27, 28).

But consider some of Jesus' other admonitions.

He says in this same passage of scripture, if we are angry with our brother or call him a fool, we are guilty of murder and deserving of the hell of fire. Both of these scriptures clearly demonstrate we, in our own human strength, are unable to keep ourselves right with God. When Jesus also tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us, we balk. Jesus tells us to turn our cheek when somebody gives us a slap, to get slapped on the other side; and how do we feel about those words? Jesus tells us to remove an eye or hand if it causes us to sin, and do we actually do that? Happily, the Holy Spirit's power can make us holy.

Looking at a person of the opposite sex does not mean that you have committed sin. You can admire a person and still not be committing sin. If you imagine a physical relationship with that person, you get caught in the snare of fantasizing and can become unable to control your desires.

This loss of control can include deviant sexual behaviour, and even joking about sex in conversation (treating with lightness something that deserves respect), nurturing an unnatural desire to talk about sex. Engaging in an unbridled appetite for any illicit thing is not funny nor will it be satisfied.

Many people have felt condemned because they looked with lust at another person. It is a miserable, defeating realization that lusting in the heart is actually the same as committing adultery. Why are the two the same? In order to understand this, we must start with these words from Proverbs: "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he." Lust is sin because it begins in the mind and, if unchecked, is acted out afterward. You think because nobody can see your thoughts, you are safe. You think you can fantasize about the woman next door and dream of a sexual relationship with her and that nobody will be the wiser because nobody can see your dreams. But that's not true.

Sexual perverts begin their acts of crime by thinking about them. A recent study of pedophiles shows they thought constantly about their heinous acts against small children long before they committed them. Lust begins in daydreams, thoughts, and attitudes. Jesus said if we have thought about adultery, we have committed it, so we need to stop these thoughts before they stake a claim in our mind. We have God-given power to control the sin of lust. It takes choice. We, not our environment, dictate the place of lust in our life. We will not be victims of lust when we can honestly appraise our thoughts and selftalk and bring them directly to the Lord to be Holy Spirit laundered by truth.

God's Design

Physical attraction to one's mate is important. God expects us to love and desire the spouse He gave us. God designed our sex drive to be directed to our spouse only.

Sex is God's idea and a husband and wife can follow their instincts without fear. For the Christian husband and wife sex is a blending of their love and of their individual personhoods. The Creator intended for us to use sex to express our love for our mate. In his book, *60 Things God Said About Sex*, Lester Sumrall says, "Marriage is the most unique relationship" on earth. It is above all other human relationships. Only in marriage do two people share their minds, their souls, and even their bodies. Only in marriage do two people pledge their lifelong loyalty, 'forsaking all others,' as the wedding vow says. Only in marriage do two people join with God to bring other human beings into this world—others who are created in the image of God. Married love is holy because God created the marriage bond."

When you think pleasurable thoughts about your sexual relationship with your spouse, it is not a sin. Don't be deceived into thinking that pleasure is somehow sinful. The carnal world would have us believe that pleasure is the only purpose of sex.

The Song of Solomon describes the sexual love of a husband and wife for one another. It also symbolizes God's love for His people. Pleasure is part of and a product of the expression of love. It is not just pleasure for pleasure's sake.

"Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God (1 Cor. 10:31). We were created to enjoy sex in marriage and be a tribute to the Lord and His Word. God is glorified by a pure, unrestrained, joyous sex life. The open, unabashed freedom of married sex that flows from selfgiving love is a joy. It is without guilt. Marital love which is not contaminated or diluted by lust can experience great heights of beauty and blessing.

Lust and the Single Life

If you are a single person, the delights of sex are simply not yours at the present time. There is no way you can study the Word of God with integrity and honesty and find a loophole offering sex outside of marriage. It does not matter if you are divorced or have never married. God is protective of sex.

This does not mean He wants you to be frustrated and unhappy. He knows what is best for you, so He insists on your following His instruction. He overrules any arguments and protests you might raise. He is fully aware that society preaches free sex is okay. He knows that most of the people around you are immoral and that they consider fornication (sex between unmarried persons) and adultery (extramarital sex) normal and acceptable.

Does this put painful restrictions on your life? It may cause some frustration, but your physical drives can be controlled by the even stronger force in yourself: your thought life. What are you telling yourself about sex? Are you telling yourself how miserable it is to be single and unable to fulfill your sex drive— if you intend to remain in God's graces?

Are you telling yourself that you can't possibly resist a sexual involvement because sex, after all, is one of man's basic needs? That you can't possibly resist even the look of lust, which is the same as committing adultery?

Are you telling yourself, 'It's hopeless. I can't possibly live up to God's expectations. After all, I'm only human'? Don't flatter yourself. Don't believe the lie that your sex drive is uniquely powerful.

The truth is, everyone with normal health is capable of having a sex life. You are no different than anybody else. You can control your thoughts about sex as well as you can control your thoughts about overeating or oversleeping. Your sexual appetite is really nothing to boast about if you're single. Lust can be a problem for the married as well as the single person.

Often it is good to express your true feelings, but you do not have to act out all your feelings. It is a lie that all feelings must be expressed. You can say you feel that the Joneses' car should be yours, but that doesn't mean that you must pull out Jones from behind the driver's seat, hurl him into a ditch, and drive off in his car. You can control your thoughts and selftalk about your so-called needs.

Single person, be brave and face the fact: you cannot presently have a sex life. You live exclusive of that privilege. You have many freedoms and privileges in your life as a single person but sex is not one of them.

You may find yourself a victim of sexual fantasy unless you take time to have a good talk with yourself. Tell yourself, 'Self, you are single and you will be in control of your thoughts regarding sex.' If you allow yourself to fantasize sexual activities, if you inundate your mind with movies or pictures portraying sex, you will be a victim haunted and most miserable. You will find yourself attracted to people who are also driven by lust; the temptations will be so great that the enticement of lust will displace God's presence in your life.

It is not true that you cannot be fulfilled without sex. If you're a single person, fulfillment without sex is God's standard. God wants you to be completely happy. And happiness has nothing to do with sex. If it did, celibate Jesus would have been an extremely unhappy person....

Here are the truths about lust which will set you free:

1. Engaging in sex does not make me a happier, more worthwhile, or less frustrated person.

2. Engaging in sex is not the answer to the needs in my life. Sex is not a need, but a drive, and if God has said sex outside of marriage is forbidden, then He will provide for me the power to live a life of beauty, integrity, strength, and joy—without sex, as long as I am single.

3. I can refuse to bow my knee to anything, including lust, when I have chosen to bow my knee only to the resurrected King of kings, Jesus Christ.

4. I will not die if I remain single and celibate. I may not have chosen the single life, but there are many things in this world one would not choose and yet can be happy in spite of. God has promised to supply all my needs, so I consider myself a person with all needs met.

5. If I am unmarried, I am not being deprived. God is generous. He constantly gives and therefore I choose to put myself in a receiving frame of mind and take the joy and the rich experiences God has for me as a single person.

Jesus did not come to bleach your life of colour, to rob it of delight and joy. He came that your joy might be full. You are complete in Christ. Married or single you will find your completeness and fulfillment only in Jesus Christ.

Controlling Your Thought Life

"Bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). When you catch your mind wandering, before it becomes engulfed by cravings and you become swamped by uncontrolled illicit desires, stop yourself. It is possible for you to control your own thoughts.

You may think you are tormented by some outside force which you have no control over. This is not true. Counteract such self-talk with the truth:

1. "I am not tormented by outside forces over which I have no control. I refuse to dwell on obsessive sexual thoughts, as well as all unhealthy and unclean thoughts."

2. "I can tell myself to stop before I allow a thought to take root in my mind. I can resist the devil and he will flee from me if I am submitting my thoughts to God."

3. "Sex and sex fantasies have no power over me. I have been my own worst enemy and I choose now to be my friend instead. I choose now to think pure and good and holy thoughts."

Thinking good thoughts may take some work if you are not used to it. Start by reading good books, watching wholesome television programs (or turning off the TV permanently), fellowshiping with other Christians who are positive about God and life, praying and studying God's Word regularly....

A Testimony of Freedom

A man had been arrested several times for sex crimes. He finally gave his heart to the Lord Jesus and through hard work and much effort on his part, the miraculous and life-giving power of God transformed his life. He does not give his testimony in churches often, because it is not the kind of testimony that wins acceptance. Most would rather hear how someone was healed of a disease than hear how someone was delivered from lust. He said one day in church with tears streaking down his face:

"I cannot explain what it is like to be free from lust. I was driven by such a horrible and hideous monster within me. That monster was myself. I was controlled by ugly and unclean thoughts constantly.

"To be free of these thoughts and this overwhelming drive is more wonderful than I can describe. To wake up with lovely thoughts in the morning is like being in heaven. I no longer have tormenting nightmares. I am free, really free, at last. Jesus has set me free. I'm filled with His Spirit. I'm a totally new person!"

Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17). When a person is (begotten) by the Holy Spirit, he not only is a child of God, he begins to think and act as a child of God (p.117-127).

GLUTTONY

The last of the seven deadly sins is gluttony. The Macquarie dictionary defines a glutton as "one who eats to excess".

Now gluttony can be more broader in definition than that but, first of all, let's look at the behaviour mentioned in that definition - excessive eating or an obsession with food.

The first point that I would like to make about gluttony is NOT all people who are overweight are gluttons and just because someone is not overweight does not mean they are not gluttonous.

Before we discuss this in a little more detail let's look at a few scriptures that relate to this subject.

The first passage I'd like to look at is Proverbs 23:20-21 which reads, "Be not among winebibbers, or among gluttonous eaters of meat for the drunkard and the glutton will come to poverty, and drowsiness will clothe a man with rags."

Gluttony is spoken of in a negative sense in this verse as a condition that will result in poverty. Overspending on excess food that one doesn't need can hurt financially.

In Phillipians 3:18-19 Paul tells about certain false christians, "For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things."

These false christians made their fleshly appetites an idol by placing those desires ahead of God and His ways. What those appetites were we can't say. They could have included their sexual appetites or being gluttonous for food or alcohol.

Paul also tells us in 1 Corinthians, "Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are....For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's" (1 Cor 3:16-17, 6:20).

Paul tells us that because we have God's spirit in us our bodies are holy to God - set apart for His purpose.

Now because our bodies are holy to God we should honour God by looking after our bodies. The main thrust of his argument is not to dishonour God in our bodies by committing fornication or any other immoral sexual act but the principle is broader than that.

We should honour God by keeping ourselves in reasonable shape physically, keeping ourselves healthy and not abuse it through such practices as overeating or gluttony, drunkenness, smoking and substance abuse. By doing those practices we break the principle of glorifying God in our bodies.

The Bible does not specifically label smoking, taking drugs or gluttony as sins. We can only say they are such because they break this principle.

One common misunderstanding in trying to understand the subject of gluttony is that of equating gluttony with being overweight. It is very easy to judge others wrongly based on this assumption.

There are differences between people and one of those differences is that of our metabolic rate. Those with a high metabolic rate can eat a lot without putting on weight while those with a slow metabolic rate can eat a lot less but still struggle to keep their weight down. Most of us have a much higher metabolic rate before we hit adulthood as the body is using what we eat to help build our bodies. It then slows down and many of us begin to put on extra weight if we have the same food intake.

This is aggravated by the high amount of fat and sugars in processed foods which constitute a high portion of our Western diets and a lack of exercise for many of us who have office jobs. Our foods are getting faster and we are getting slower.

There are also those who have genetic defects in their metabolic mechanism that leads to obesity that they can hardly control.

With these factors in mind we need to be careful not to prejudge people who are overweight.

I empathise with those who struggle to lose weight as it can be quite a difficult thing to do with so many other things that demand our time when we really need the time to exercise to supplement a good diet. When it comes to dieting often the first lot of pounds seem easy to shed and then when you go further the next ones are like trying to break through a brick wall and are very difficult to shed. Unless there is also a change to more healthy diet habits with less fattening and sugary foods most people who lose weight will regain the weight they lose. This takes discipline and with so many temptations around us it can be quite difficult to maintain.

I would prefer to have a go at dieting on my own if I am carrying just a few pounds too many but I know if a few pounds became way too many pounds I would go to dieting experts like Weight Watchers or whoever I thought would be most effective at helping me, such as a program that would provide all my calorie-controlled meals that would cut down the discipline that I would need to put in. I would encourage anyone who is seriously overweight, as opposed to mildly overweight, to do such a thing.

Obesity (defined as being excessively overweight) can be dangerous to one's health, particular increasing one's risk of heart disease. Though, for some, it can be much harder than others to bring one's weight down, we should do our best to make sure we don't stretch the image of God, that we are, too far.

It can be a tough struggle but as long as we do our best God will be pleased that we are trying to glorify Him in our bodies **even if the results aren't all that forthcoming.**

We do need a proper sense of pride in our appearance. There are many, though, who show little effort to do so, whether it be dressing slovenly or gorging down food and not caring anything about their obesity by letting themselves go.

We are ambassadors of Christ and we can't afford to have such an indifferent attitude to the way we present ourselves.

Now I said before that just because someone is slim does not mean that they are not a glutton. For their comments on this I'd like to quote again from "Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?" by William Backus and Marie Chapian. They write:

You may think gluttony doesn't pertain to you because you are very finicky about what you eat. You hardly eat a thing. Maybe you excuse yourself with, "I hate to eat." This is gluttony, because the deadly sin of gluttony is preoccupation with food, period. A glutton focuses day and night attention on food, whether he or she eats it or not.

Many people of average weight have sought counsel in order to overcome gluttonous habits. "I think about food constantly," said Delores, an attractive woman in her twenties. "I'm finicky about food. I eat only health foods, but I feel as if I'm pigging out at every meal. Then I starve myself. Food is an obsession with me. I despise junk food, so I've been a vegetarian for two years. But I eat constantly. I have to run at least five miles a day to burn up the excess calories I consume."

Beautiful Delores is a glutton.

Mel, a slender 35-year-old businessman, eats only the finest foods. When he travels, he special orders his meals on airplanes. He refuses traditional dishes and dines exclusively on exotic foods prepared by either himself in his gourmet kitchen or by the best chefs in the restaurants he favours. His life centers around food. He spends countless hours shopping for and preparing food. A dinner party at Mel's is an experience people don't forget.

Mel, though slim, is a glutton.

We can include under the category of gluttony such things as alcohol and drug abuse, and cigarette smoking—anything to which a person bows the knee because he thinks he must have it. If a person desires to consume something with little thought for anything or anyone else, he is gluttonous. The object of the gluttony becomes an idol, and God is pushed far off into the background.

If you are a glutton you believe what you crave is good for you. When you are tempted to drink too much, your self-talk is, "Oh, this won't hurt me. It'll be fun!"...When you break your diet and go on an eating binge, your self-talk is, "This food tastes so good; it'll be good for me to have it. I can't deny myself something so good.

A major lie of gluttony is, "I must have what I want because it will make me happy, even if it's bad for me." The devil cannot possibly trip a person until he is persuaded something is true which is actually false. Many times in a Free To Be Thin group, we will hear words such as, "I have a weak will and I just can't help myself where food is concerned." This of course is not true. God has given each person a will with which to carry out his own choices....

The gluttonous lie they each believe is, “I must have what I want.” Pleasure and comfort sit at the top of their needs list.

If you are telling yourself, “I don't have any self-control; I'm a spineless jellyfish,” you must realize and admit the lie before you can be free.

If gluttony is your problem, if you believe that you can't give up something, that you can't quit smoking, that you can't give up drunkenness...that you can't stop overeating, there are some useful steps you should take to disprove that notion:

1. Acknowledge your condition. Once you have acknowledged that your behaviours are gluttonous, you can begin to be free. The Holy Spirit will lead you into all truth. [It] will empower you by providing the truth for the situation. You then must use the truth God has shown.

2. Realize how important you are to God and how much He wants you to overcome sin. If you practice sin, which destroys, you apparently consider yourself of no value.

3. Look beyond momentary gratification. Find yourself a comfortable chair, sit down and imagine yourself saying no to the temptation you're having trouble with. Live through the moment of temptation. Tell yourself, “I don't need this momentary thrill. It is a lie that it would be good for me.”

4. Learn to identify Satan's voice. Satan, the enemy of God, tries to convince you to engage in some behaviour that will ultimately hurt you. He never tells the whole truth. He can't. He is a liar. You will always feel compelled to comfort yourself with something that will harm you if you are acting on a lie of Satan.

5. Learn to identify God's voice. God will always tell you the truth.

Why do we resist God's Word and the power of God within us? There are at least two reasons:

1. We refuse to help ourselves change because we believe that what we want is far more important than anything else in the world—even more important than what God wants, even though only He knows what is best for us.

2. We believe it will be too difficult to change. Certainly living without any rules or discipline is easy, but it lacks joy.

“Blessed [happy] is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly” (Ps. 1:1). Let the sinner live as a sinner; we must live as persons empowered with the Holy Spirit and stand against the things intended to destroy us.

We are free to be fulfilled by God. Gluttony forfeits that freedom, leaving us bound to continue sinning—“One more chocolate éclair will make me happy.” But we are temples of the Holy Spirit, dwellings of God, and dead to sin.”(p.130-135)

Now let's look at some other forms of gluttony.

Alcohol

In her book "How to Be Happy Though Young" Darien Cooper tells us the following about alcohol and alcoholism:

A staggering number of teenagers have already succumbed to alcoholism. Statistics from the U.S.A.'s National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism tells us that among America's 9 million alcoholics, about 1.3 million boys and girls between the ages of 12 and 17 have serious drinking problems and the number is growing at a frightening rate.

Why has alcohol become the number 1 turn on for teenagers? Perhaps many drink for the same reasons that young people smoke marijuana - to be accepted in the group, out of curiosity and to escape problems. But the main contributing factor is that alcohol is much more accessible than other drugs and it's not illegal. According to the N.I.A.A.A. of America about one third of high school students in America get drunk at least once a month.

Whether it's beer, wine, whisky or vodka, the substance that affects you is ethyl alcohol. Ethyl alcohol is extremely soluble in water. So soluble, in fact, that when you sip it, part of it is absorbed right through your tongue and gums before you have time to swallow it! When ethyl alcohol enters your stomach, it is absorbed directly into the bloodstream. It is quickly carried to every organ in the body - especially to your brain. When the alcohol reaches around the current drink-driving limit of 0.05% the centre in your brain concerned with worry will be affected. Your worries will be temporarily pushed aside and you will have of sense of being lifted up.

After a few drinks some people who are normally shy and quiet become lively and even boisterous. Because of this effect, many think that alcohol is a stimulant. But actually it is a depressant that works on the central nervous system. If you drink enough to raise the blood alcohol to the next level (0.1%), the part of the brain which controls your muscles is affected. High levels of alcohol in the blood will depress brain activity, reduce inhibitions and self-control, sharply alter behaviour and personality, severely affect judgment and dull sensory perception.

If a person drinks enough to reach the 0.2% Level, he tends to become sleepy. Still higher levels of alcohol in the blood from steady, heavy drinking can anaesthetise the deepest levels of the brain and may result in coma or even death."(p.169-171)

What does the Bible say about the use of alcohol. I would like to quote from the WCG telecast brochure entitled "Conquering Alcohol Abuse" for its comments. We read:

Many devout, religious people sincerely believe that God has forbidden any use of alcoholic beverages - that any use of alcohol is totally wrong and sinful. God is the creator of every good and beneficial thing. The scriptures reveal the divine will and mind of God about how man should live (2 Tim. 3:16). God has certainly not neglected to reveal His will in such a vital area as the use of alcohol.

Wine and other alcoholic drink are frequently mentioned in the Bible....The particular Hebrew word translated wine is 'yayin'. This word is used over 130 times in the Hebrew Bible to mean fermented wine, not grape juice. This same beverage, when used excessively, causes drunkenness. Proof is found in Genesis 9:21 where Noah drank 'yayin' excessively and became drunk. Lot...also became drunk on this same beverage (Gen.19:30-36). It was also the same beverage used by Nabal so that he too became drunken (1 Sam.25:36)....

It should be mentioned that naturally fermented wine is between 10 and 14% alcohol. Higher alcohol contents are fortified wines. The high alcohol drinks, called hard liquor today (40% to 50% alcohol or 80 to 100 proof) were not in existence during the writing of the Old and New Testaments.

The hard liquors are produced by the distilling of grain-based mash or material from other vegetable sources. They did not come into widespread use until the Middle Ages. The danger of these high alcoholic drinks is that, unless one carefully dilutes and uses them, they rapidly lend themselves to abuse, drunkenness and alcoholism. Liqueurs, flavoured and sweetened distilled liquors, are somewhat different in that they are usually served in small amounts and sipped slowly.

The Bible says that God gave wine to make men glad (Ps.104:15). Why have some men and women turned this blessing into a curse? The answer is that most have refused to follow God's instructions to living and in the use of alcohol....

John the Baptist did not drink wine (oinos in the Greek) or any other form of alcohol because it was prophesied that he wouldn't (Luke 1:15). However, Jesus Christ did drink oinos (wine). He said He did in Matthew 11:19 and Luke 7:34....

Jesus' first miracle was to change water into wine (oinos)....On the occasion Christ turned six jars of twenty or thirty gallons each into wine (oinos). This was no small miracle. This kind of wine the steward of the feast said was of the finest quality – "You have kept the good wine until now (John 2:10, RSV). At such wedding feasts, after men had drunk the better wine, the hosts brought out lesser quality wines. Another proof that "oinos" is fermented wine is the fact that the apostle Paul said, "Be not drunk with wine (oinos)"(Eph.5:18). Paul did not mean to avoid getting drunk on grape juice! Sick, perhaps, but not drunk.

Paul instructed Timothy, "Drink no longer water, but use a little wine (oinos) for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities" (1 Tim.5:23). Notice, he said to use only a little wine, not a lot. The purpose of this wine was Timothy's frequent stomach ailments. Medical science has proven the benefits of small amounts of wine for some human stomach problems.

Both the Old and New Testaments contain many examples and commands against excessive use of alcohol and drunkenness. Drunkenness is listed as one of the works of the flesh (Gal.5:21). That means it is the result of the undisciplined, indiscriminate use of alcohol....

Throughout the Bible God is strong to judge those who are "mighty to drink" (Isa. 5:22). Excessive drinkers are committing a grave evil in God's eyes (Prov. 23:20-21, Isa. 28:1-8)....

Total alcohol prohibitionists focus on those scriptures which condemn or show the results of wrong alcohol use but neglect those scriptures that show there can be a proper moderate use. (Article - Alcohol: What the Bible Really Says, p.16-17)

The degree and amount consumed to which alcohol affects people varies from individual to individual. The above quoted brochure "Conquering Alcohol Abuse" tells us the following about some of these differences:

Depending on learned and conditioned cues or expectations when drinking, alcohol may produce a calming, relaxing effect in one situation, belligerence in another, frivolity in another, sleepiness in another and sexual abandon in another....A small amount of alcohol often takes the edge off self-criticism and self-doubt. Many persons feel emotionally freer, more communicative yet are in control of their emotions and actions. Many find this adds enjoyment to certain social occasions."(Article - Conquering Alcohol Abuse, p.3-4)

Generally between the legal alcohol limit for driving of 0.05% and 0.1%, intoxication will start to occur for most people but again this varies. The general formula for working out the blood alcohol in your system is subtract the number of hours since your first drink from the number of full strength beers (250ml) or alcohol equivalent you've drunk and multiply it by 0.015%.

eg. 5 Beers(5%,250ml) - 2 hours = 3. $3 \times 0.015\% = 0.045\%$.
2 Small glasses of wine(10%,150ml) = 3 beers(5%,250ml).
3 - 1 Hour = 2. $2 \times 0.015\% = 0.03\%$.

It takes one hour for your body to eliminate the alcohol in one beer from your bloodstream. Once intoxication proper starts to occur from 0.10% and beyond depending on how accustomed your body is to alcohol, a number of things can start to happen. According to the same brochure I just quoted from they include:

Loss of social restraints, loss of control over body movements and loss of emotional control start to occur. Harmful aspects of the human personality - defects of character normally controlled - often then come out. A person may manifest a Dr Jekyll-Mr Hyde personality....

Most, but not all, alcoholics go from controlled social drinking to complete addiction in seven phases.

- 1) Controlled social drinking
- 2) Purposeful occasional drinking to escape from tensions
- 3) Frequent escape drinking in which tolerance to alcohol steadily increases
- 4) Early alcoholic phase with first blackout
- 5) Progressive preoccupation with alcohol
- 6) Complete alcohol dependence, danger of withdrawal symptoms
- 7) Social, medical and spiritual help needed or death occurs....

Our western world in particular promotes the attitude of “do your own thing” and this attitude has led to great numbers abusing alcohol and into alcoholism....

Millions of adolescents do not receive their alcohol education in a disciplined, happy home environment. Instead they receive it in the peer-pressured ‘beer bash’ with its so-called fun of ‘getting smashed’, ‘bombed’, ‘loaded’, ‘soused’, ‘plastered’ or ‘clobbered’. There is a lot of popular terminology to lessen guilt and dress up the evil consequences of drunkenness and lack of self-control.

In the western world there have been stronger and stronger social and advertising pressures to lead many to believe alcohol is indispensable to having a good time. In many social occasions people are expected to drink (a trend which is now fortunately changing). There are still widespread attitudes that associate drinking and “holding one’s liquor” with masculinity and virility and being part of the “in” group. (Article - Conquering Alcohol Abuse, p.4-7)

Alcohol abuse starts occurring when a person automatically reaches for and consumes alcohol excessively whenever he or she has emotional problems or difficulties.

Over a period of time a person can become psychologically addicted to alcohol as a method of coping with personal problems. By persistently keeping alcohol in the bloodstream, a person may alter his metabolism and become physically addicted to alcohol as well.

Alcohol should be never be used to escape problems or cure loneliness, boredom or depression. Using alcohol for such reasons is habit forming and worsens, not solves, these problems. The Bible teaches us to resolve our problems the right way. God’s way to solve personal problems and frustrations is through prayer, seeking forgiveness and setting our minds and values aright or straightening out our inter-personal wrongs. God’s way is not to reach for an alcoholic drink!”(Article - The Slide Into Abuse, p.6)

The hardest thing about alcoholism is the incredible difficulty alcoholics have in admitting their problem and seeking the help they need. It is very important before any attempt is made to confront an alcoholic that the person doing the confronting has a good understanding of the nature of the confrontation process by seeking help from experts trained in such matters.

The proper rehabilitation of an alcoholic must be more than a drying out period and an interlude between binges of drinking. There must be a well designed program to get the alcoholic back on his feet and started in a new life of sobriety. They have to learn how to cope with life and problems without alcohol. Alcohol related car deaths make up over half of all fatal auto accidents.

Darien Cooper in her book “How To Be Happy Though Young” tells us the following about the terrible effects of mixing drinking with driving:

Drinking and driving should never be mixed. Did you realize that each 5 years more than 125 000 Americans are killed in alcohol-related auto accidents? That's more than all the deaths of Americans in Korea and Vietnam combined...

[There is a difference between being over the safe driving alcohol limit and being intoxicated so it can be deceptive.] You may not show any visible signs that drinking has affected you but that is part of the problem. While the alcohol is being eliminated from your blood, you may be convinced that you are sober enough and perfectly capable of driving but you aren't. A few beers can make the traffic light, the stop sign and the speed limit seem unimportant or nonexistent. The reflexes aren't so sharp. That fire hydrant or that pedestrian pops out of nowhere. Distances are misjudged."(p.172-173)

Two nationalities that have very low alcohol abuse are the Jews and Italians. Their example is one we can learn from, especially when it comes to teaching our children about alcohol. In the article Conquering Alcohol Abuse we read that they have:

The custom of providing children with a long education of moderate alcohol use, usually low-proof wine and encouraging responsible drinking with family members at meals. Alcohol used by children is often diluted with water and drunk in small amounts. Such drinking diminishes the alcohol "high" and tends to establish and enforce moderate drinking habits. Drunkenness is also frowned upon.(p.7)

Alcohol is not a necessity of life. There are many other non-alcoholic drinks a person can enjoy. Alcohol is a great blessing from God to enjoy as long as we don't make it into a curse by overindulging. If we drink, He holds us responsible for how we conduct ourselves. It is a test of our character!

Smoking

Darien Cooper in her book "How To Be Happy Though Young" tells us the following about smoking:

"It makes me feel like a man", 15 year old Steve said as he blew smoke around his head. At 15 he takes up smoking to prove that he is a man and 10 years later he tries to give it up to prove the same thing. I could write pages explaining that heavy smoking increases one's chances of dying from lung cancer and other diseases. There is no question that smoking is harmful to a person. In 1970 the U.S. Congress legislated that each pack of cigarettes carry this warning: 'Cigarette smoking is dangerous to your health'. The following testimony of a smoker says much better than I ever could what a habit begun in your youth can produce only a few years later.

"Dear Ann Landers,

"This letter is based strictly on my own feeling about cigarettes after 24 years of smoking. I'm ashamed to admit I'm still at it. I doubt that my words will have the slightest impact on the heavily addicted. For me, all the words in the world will not take the place of that first cigarette in the morning. I'd rather address myself to your readers who are 17, as I once was, with a set of healthy set of lungs, white teeth, clean blood coursing through my veins - and in my pocket my first packet of cigarettes.

"How was I to know that 24 years later I'd be so hooked that any thought of quitting would be out of the question? How would I know, at 17, I'd be waking up each morning to a mouth that tastes like the bottom of a birdcage? How could I know my teeth would be stained dark brown and my chest would feel as if it were filled with cement dust?

"All I knew was that smoking was the cool thing to do. It made me feel grown up. Although I have never seen my lungs, I know how they must look. My uncle, who is a surgeon, once showed me some 'before' and 'after' pictures. 'Sit in on an autopsy one of these days', he said. 'You'll see that the nonsmoker's lungs are a bright pink. When I open up the chest cavity of a smoker, I can tell about his habit, because the entire respiratory system is black, depending on how long he has smoked.'

"Still I continue the filthy habit, going half crazy on mornings when I'm out of cigarettes. I go digging through ashtrays and wastebaskets for a long butt to satisfy my craving. I pace the floor like a hungry lion, waiting for the store to open. Then I hurry, unshaven, and hand over another 55 cents for a package of suicide.

"With that first puff I realize nothing about it tastes good. Those ads are a lot of malarky. But the people who sell cigarettes couldn't care less about me. I'm hooked and they love it. They run those sexy ads, telling you to "c'mon". But don't be fooled, 17, it's not a bandwagon you'll be hopping on. It's a hearse.

"If I could write cigarette ads, I'd show you pictures of myself, coughing till the tears come, gargling away a rotten taste that keeps returning, spending money I can't afford - stupid me, sucking on a little, white, stupid pacifier. Then I'd show you the clothes I've burned and the people I've offended with my breath, my smoke, my ashes, my matches and my butts.

"This is me, 17, a rasping, spitting, foggy-breathed addict who has let the habit consume me, a 'can't quitter' who creates his own air pollution, who prefers carbon monoxide to oxygen, whose sinuses are constantly draining. Me, with the yellow fingers and the foul breath, smoking more and enjoying it less - telling you that I wish to God that someone had wised me up when I was 17.

A fool who hates himself."

A smoker may be thinking, "There is no use to quit now - it's too late." However research shows that not to be true. Even the heaviest of smokers, if an irreversible disease has not yet begun, can, upon giving up cigarettes, reduce his chances of getting these diseases.

After a smoker quits, there is a marked drop in the risk of heart attacks after only one year. After ten years in many exsmokers, according to the Heart Foundation, the death rate is almost as low as those people who have never smoked. It is possible for the lungs of an exsmoker to return to almost as normal as those of a person who never smoked. At the very least, giving up the cigarette habit will prevent further damage to the lungs.

The risk of lung cancer increases with the amount of cigarettes smoked and the number of years of smoking. However, for the exsmoker, the lung-cancer risk decreases in a ratio roughly proportionate to the number of years since quitting. [Not to mention all the money you will save from not smoking.]”(p.175-177)

Drugs

For its comments about drug abuse I would like to quote from the lead article in a WCG telecast brochure entitled “Conquering Drug Abuse”. We read:

Cocaine, heroin, nicotine and other drugs have swept through almost every major society like a brushfire. Developing and developed nations alike are plagued with drug problems....

According to the U.S. Public Health Service, 20 years ago less than 2% of America's young people had tried an illicit drug. Today about 2 out of 3 have tried an illegal drug before they graduate from high school - over a 3000% increase.

And the reasons studies find so many use drugs and alcohol? To feel better, to cope with life, escape boredom, increase self-esteem, to expand consciousness, for kicks, to relieve stress, ease physical discomfort, lessen depression, diminish fear! What an indictment of society!....

These methods of coping and resolving problems, of finding meaning and enjoyment in life, are unhealthy solutions. They create, instead, new problems for the drug user and society!....

Drugs and alcohol are never real or lasting solutions to human emotional problems. Certain drugs and painkillers may serve at special times to save human lives but they are not the solution to most personal and emotional problems.

Chemical shortcuts to cope with personal anxieties and difficulties, or to achieve "kicks" or relieve stress may seem to give temporary relief. But if persisted in their side effects result in serious - sometimes irreversible - physical, mental or emotional penalties.

Many drugs temporarily allow one to avoid facing and dealing with the true cause of problems. But the drug-taking, in turn, often creates additional serious problems. Wouldn't it be so much better if as much as possible, we could cope with our stresses and emotional problems without the huge costs and side-effects of drugs or

alcohol? What have we been overlooking, physically and spiritually, that will help in finding solutions to or coping with our problems?

Has life become dull or lost meaning and purpose to you? Have you failed to find the joys of hope and peace of mind in life? Have you assumed there is no other hope or alternative but mind-altering drugs or alcohol to cope with your problems, anxieties and fears?

Purposeless, hopelessness, boredom, anxiety, despair all have a cause. The cause is broken spiritual and/or physical laws....

Pain and suffering are intended to be physical warning signals that something needs to be changed or avoided. Too many feel they must avoid all pain and suffering while they go on doing the things that cause pain and suffering. Why carelessly numb or dwarf your human spirit, your abilities and health by abuse of chemicals?

If you are ensnared in the drug trap, it is time you learned to solve your personal problems through available human help and through contact with God rather than escaping in drugs and alcohol.”(Conquering Drug Abuse, p.2-3)

OTHER WORKS OF THE FLESH

Before we move on to the subject of breaking the cycle of sin in our lives let us briefly look at some other sins which are also fruits from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Hatred is bearing resentment toward someone - looking on others with complete disdain and worthlessness. We must hate sin with the same passion that God hates sin if we are to remove it from our lives but hatred should not be directed toward people. Christ told us to love our enemies in Matthew 5:44. All of us, our enemies included, are potential sons and daughters of God. The vast majority of humanity will one day repent and become a part of God's family.

We may not like their personalities or certain bad traits that they have but we should love them by being concerned for their welfare and that they have God's best for them. Often if we initiate kindness towards them they will, in time, come around and treat us with kindness.

We should “speak evil of no one” (Tit. 3:2) but be “peaceable, gentle, showing all humility to all men” (Tit. 3:2). Harboring grudges against people makes us miserable and embittered. A root of bitterness (Heb.12:15) can be spiritually destructive causing us to give away our calling. Hatred is most often a natural impulse toward those who hate or hurt us and who stand in the way of the things that we selfishly want. If we have faith God loves us then God will deal with those who hurt us, even if He chooses to delay for quite some time. Vengeance is God's” (Rom.12:19) and if we truly have faith in that then there is no need for or moral right for us to hate others. Hatred is a destructive sin leading to violence, verbal and physical abuse of others, war and ultimately the death of others.

Unforgiveness is an unwillingness to forgive or show mercy toward others who hurt us. Unforgiveness is a form of harbouring a grudge against someone which leads us to bitterness which can eat away at our souls. Not only that if we refuse to forgive others then God will refuse to forgive us of our sins (Matt.6:14-15)! The parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18 shows us how much more God forgives compared to the forgiveness He expects us to give to others who are truly sorry for hurting us. What right have we not to forgive others when God has forgiven so many more sins that we have committed?

Dishonesty is to knowingly deceive or mislead - to tell a lie and not the whole truth. The Handbook of Bible Application makes these comments about the subject of dishonesty:

Dishonest people soon begin to believe their own lies. Then they lose the ability to tell the difference between truth and falsehood. By believing your own lies you will deceive yourself, alienate yourself from God, and lose credibility in all your relationships. In the long run, honesty wins out...Dishonesty is a difficult sin to avoid. It is easy to cheat if we think no one else looking. But dishonesty affects the very core of a person. It makes him untrustworthy and untrusting. It eventually makes him unable to know himself or relate to others. Don't take dishonesty lightly. Even the smallest portion of dishonesty contains enough of the poison of deceit to kill your spiritual life. If there is any dishonesty in your life, tell God about it now (p.167).

Disrespectfulness is showing a lack of respect for others - not showing rightful honour and respect to those who by virtue of public office or responsibilities have authority over us. Hebrews 13:17 discusses the subject of respect for others. Paul in that verse says: "Obey those who rule over you and be submissive for they watch out for your souls as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief for that would be unprofitable to you." This means we should have a deep respect of God's authority and also respect those in our community who have authority over us from policemen, employers, those who are over us in the church and also our parents.

Sometimes the decisions made by those over us may not be all that wise nevertheless we should respect their authority by abiding by their decisions. We should with respect voice our opinion if we think the decisions to be made are wrong but in the end we must let them decide and obey those decisions unless, of course, they clearly conflict with God's law.

Rebellion is open resistance against legitimate authority. By not abiding by the laws and decisions of those over us we put ourselves in a position to be rightly punished by that authority over us and bringing shame on ourselves and others around us.

Contentioning is deliberately stirring up argument against others or between them. Contentioning often shows selfishness and a lack of humility by fighting and arguing

to have our own way when we should be more willing to yield. It leads to hurt feelings and hatred between people.

Blasphemy is speaking with no respect towards God and taking God's name in vain. We can also show no respect to God by speaking evil about Him and His way of life by being hypocritical, claiming to be a christian while knowingly rebelling against His laws.

Rudeness is a lack of courtesy. It is lacking concern for others feelings and values and having no regard for accepted etiquette. It is a lack of consideration for others causing offence.

Unthankfulness is showing a lack of gratitude to someone who has done something to benefit us in some way. Paul wrote, "in everything give thanks for this is God's will for you" (1 Thess. 5:18). Don't fall into the trap of ingratitude - be aware of the good things that people do for you and express sincere gratitude toward them.

Partiality is preferring someone or something above another - esteeming one better than another - favouritism - a form of passing judgment on others usually based on the outward appearance, not on the very character and proven record of the individuals concerned. This includes racial prejudice, male chauvinism, favouritism for the empirical self - my nation, my team, etc. God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34), nor should we be.

The Handbook of Bible Application has this to say about the subject of favouritism:

"Therefore, I have made you contemptible in the eyes of all the people; for you have not obeyed me, but you let your favourites break the law without rebuke." (Malachi 2:9, TLB)

Favouritism reveals a destructive double standard. Malachi was angry at the priests because, though they were to be God's messengers, they did not know God's will. And this lack of knowledge caused them to lead God's people astray. Their ignorance was willful and inexcusable. The priests had allowed influential and favoured people to break the law. The priests were so dependent on these people for support that they could not afford to confront them when they did wrong. In your church, are certain people allowed to do wrong without criticism? There should be no double standard based on wealth or position. Let your standards be those presented in God's Word. Playing favourites is contemptible in God's sight (see James 2:1-9).

"Dear brothers, how can you claim that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, if you show favouritism to rich people and look down on poor people?" (James 2:1, TLB)

Favouritism betrays Christ. James condemns acts of favouritism. Often we treat a well-dressed, impressive-looking person better than someone who looks poor. We do this because we would rather identify with successful people than with apparent

failures. The irony, as James reminds us, is that the supposed winners may have gained their impressive life-style at our expense. In addition, the rich find it difficult to identify with the Lord Jesus who came as a humble servant. Are you easily impressed by status, wealth, or fame? Are you partial to the 'haves' while ignoring the 'have nots'? This attitude is sin. God views all people as equals; and if he favours anyone, it is the poor and the powerless. We should follow his example.

Favouritism devalues people for whom Christ died. Why is it wrong to judge a person by his or her economic status? Wealth may indicate intelligence, wise decision-making, and hard work. On the other hand, it may mean only that a person had the good fortune of being born into a wealthy family. Or it can even be the sign of greed, dishonesty, and selfishness.

By honouring someone just because he or she dresses well, we are making appearance more important than character. Sometimes we do this because:

(1) poverty makes us uncomfortable; we don't want to face our responsibilities to those who have less than we do;

(2) we want to be wealthy too, and we hope to use the rich person as a means to that end;

(3) we want the rich person to join our church and help support it financially.

All these motives are selfish; they view neither the rich nor the poor person as a human being in need of fellowship. If we say that Christ is our Lord, then we must live as he requires, showing no favouritism and loving all people regardless of whether they are rich or poor.

Favouritism indicates an ignorance of God's values. We are often partial to the rich because we mistakenly assume that riches are a sign of God's blessing and approval. But God does not promise us earthly rewards or riches; in fact, Christ calls us to be ready to suffer for him and give up everything in order to hold on to eternal life (Matthew 6:19-21; 19:28-30; Luke 12:14-34; Romans 8:15-21; I Timothy 6:17-19). We will have untold riches in eternity if we are faithful in our present life (Luke 6:35; John 12:23-25; Galatians 6:7- 10; Titus 3:4-8).(p.219-220)

Unfriendliness is a lack of friendliness or hospitality to others - a hostility or lack of acceptance to others. Do we show kindness to all? Do we freely welcome all people? The antidote to unfriendliness is love and hospitality - reaching out to others and offering them conversation, fellowship and other acts of kindness.

Idolatry is worship of the creation rather than the Creator or putting anything before God and obedience to His will. If money, your job, material possessions, self-importance, sports, society or your hobbies occupy more interest than anything else in your life it becomes the god you serve and worship. There is no place in God's plan for a second God in your life. God must be number one in your life.

BREAKING THE CYCLE OF SIN

In order to defeat sin in our lives we must understand how it works in our lives. In the Book of James we read how sin ensnares us. To comment on this famous passage of scripture I'd to quote from Charles Swindoll's book "Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back". In it he writes:

There are four basic principles regarding temptation. Before we deal with how to handle it, let's get those principles down. They all lie within three verses of James 1.

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God'; for God cannot be tempted by evil, and He Himself does not tempt anyone. But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin; and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death" (James 1:13-15).

(1) Temptation is inevitable. "Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God.'" James did not say, "Let no one say, if he is tempted...." He said, "when he is tempted." And there's a difference.

It would be wonderful if we could live without facing temptations. But the simple fact is we cannot. If you think you've found some place, some unique Christian victory secret, some perfect location, some uninhabited island, some ideal church, some area where there is no chance for temptation, don't go there. Because when you do, you're going to spoil it! You see, when you go you take with you your mind - your thoughts - which is the vehicle of temptation. We will never be in a place on earth where there is no temptation. Never.

The monk who lives behind cloistered walls wrestles with temptations as real as the businessman in New York, Chicago, or Los Angeles. The salesman who faces the temptations of competitive life wrestles with allurements no less (and no more) than one who is engaged in the work of Christian ministry. Every one of us faces temptation. It is inevitable. We cannot get away from it.

(2) Temptation is never directed by God. He permits it, to be sure, but He never directs it. God does not direct us into sin. Notice, in James 1:13, that God cannot be tempted by evil, and God does not tempt.

Remember the words of 1 John 1:5: "God is light, and in Him there is no darkness at all." What that means is that God cannot fellowship with sin. He cannot tolerate it, nor does He direct us into it. We sin by our own choice. When the angels surrounded the throne of God in Isaiah 6:3, they rendered to Him the praise of "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord of hosts." "Holy" means "totally separate from sin."

Let me say it as carefully as I can: There is nothing wrong with facing temptations. It is not sinful to have tempting things come before us. Hebrews 4:15 tells us that Jesus was "tempted in all things as we are, yet without sin".

But how do we react to temptation?

"Let no one say when he is tempted, 'I am being tempted by God' "(James 1:13).

Have you ever found yourself doing that? The classic illustration is Adam in the garden of Eden. When Adam ate of the fruit, and God came and asked, “What is it that you have done?” do you remember what Adam said? “The woman whom Thou gavest to be with me, she gave me from the tree, and I ate.” What was he saying? “God, You set me up! Here I was, enjoying the bounty and blessing of the garden, and along came this lady that You brought into my life. And if it hadn't been for her, I wouldn't have been tempted.”

That thought is exactly what James wanted to contradict. God is not even indirectly engaged in bringing us into sin. To be sure, God certainly permits the events of our lives to take place as they do. But when we yield to the temptations that appear before us, God has had absolutely no part in that act. Instead, it is you and I who have disobeyed and given in to the temptation.

(3) Temptation is an individual manner.

“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust” (James 1:14).

I want you to underscore each one and own. When we choose to yield to temptation (and we'll deal with that process in just a moment), it is an individual matter. You cannot blame anyone else.

Nothing outside ourselves is strong enough—not even Satan—to cause us to sin. Sin takes place when we agree to the temptation and follow it. It takes an agreement on our part. Not until I individually involve myself does sin take place. Up to that point I am safe and pure...

Open doors to sin face us all each day. The person centred on Christ and His righteousness says, “Nothing doing,” and willfully walks away. The person intent on satisfying his own desires for sin (whether he is a Christian or not) says, “Oh, I just can't help myself,” and walks in. The good news for the Christian is that by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can help it!

(4) Temptation that leads to sin always follows the same overall process. Verse 14 begins the process, and verse 15 carries it out. Pay close attention:

Step 1: The bait is dropped.

Step 2: The inner desire is attracted to that bait.

Step 3: Sin occurs when we yield—when we bite the bait.

Step 4: Sin results in tragic consequences—we end up hooked and fried.

I'm using these vivid and analogous terms because of James's terminology. Watch what he wrote:

“But each one is tempted when he is carried away and enticed by his own lust. Then when lust has conceived, it gives birth to sin, and when sin is accomplished, it brings forth death” (James 1:14,15).

The word “entice” (v. 14) is a fishing term. When you fish you've got to provide a bait that interests and entices a fish.

Where I live, fish like shrimp. You put a juicy little shrimp on the hook and try to keep him alive so he keeps snapping and dancing, just as if he's swimming, and you cast out into the ocean. A big gulf trout cannot resist it, if he sees it. If you handle things just right, you've got a sure strike. Why? Because you have chosen a bait that interests the fish.

Here is that fish—safe, casual, doing whatever fish do. Then the bait drops. He has to reckon with it. I don't know how fish think, but they probably look and think something like, “Wow, that looks great!” And when that fish leaves his hiding place for the bait, he's as good as caught.

So are we.

As long as we remain obedient to the Lord, drawing our strength and our delight from Him, the evil system around us can drop all sorts of bait and it won't seriously interest us. Oh, it's there, But our Lord's Word and power are stronger and more important to us than anything out there.

But when we choose not to obey God and slip out after the bait, we're as good as gone.(p.89-93)

You may have noticed when I quoted extensively from William Backus and Marie Chapian's book “Why Do I Do What I Don't Want To Do?” they spoke a lot about identifying and defeating the lies of sin with the truth of God. The form of counselling is what they have called “Misbelief Therapy” and is quite biblical. To give an overview of what this technique is and how it works I would like to quote again from their fine book:

Sin depends upon and grows out of the believing of certain lies. The genesis of sin is untruth. The genesis of neuroses is also untruth. It is the root of drunkenness as well as depression, the root of stealing as well as overeating.

There are two very common lies with which you may be familiar. The first is "X" is good for me. Sin results from the misbelief that something contrary to the Word of God is good for you.

"X" can be stealing from a department store ('I deserve to have ...'); or hitting the kid next door ('I can't control myself'); or skipping school when you're not supposed to ('It's good for me to do exactly as I please'); or lying to your wife ('I must be right. I must please people at all times'); or innumerable other sins. Sin may seem like something good for you because it will pamper you in some way, make you feel good, save you from trouble or embarrassment, flatter you or promote you. If it promotes you, how can God say it isn't good for you? Certainly God must not understand how tough things are for you.

Possibly you tell yourself a particular sin is good for you because you 'need' it in your life—you can't do without it, it is fundamental to your happiness. So you steal that record from the record department, you lie on your time sheet at work or cheat on your income tax because you believe 'it's good for me.'

The second common untruth is, I can't help myself. This sin says, "I've got to do it. I am helpless to stop myself. The temptation is bigger than I am."

How many times have you forsaken your diet and eaten some fattening mess even though you knew you shouldn't because you said, "Oh, I just can't help myself?" Some people have given up and started smoking again because they have told themselves, "I can't make it. I'm too weak to be able to quit cigarettes." Some people have even committed adultery believing the same kind of lie.

So "X" looks good for today. You're only human, after all. And you just don't have any resistance; surely God can understand that. (You really don't want resistance because you'd rather believe "X" is good for you.)

This is how sin deceives. And according to Romans 7, sin kills. "X" is not good for you. "X" is lethal. It kills. Jesus met "X" with the truth. The devil came to Him and said, "Making bread out of stones is good for you. It will prove you're the Son of God. No one will doubt you after that." Satan also tried to convince Jesus that jumping off the temple's pinnacle was good for Him. He told Him, "It will prove to the people you really are the Messiah. What can it hurt? It will be good for you because then I'll give you the kingdom without the cross."

Jesus met every temptation by challenging its accompanying lie. He said in effect, "That isn't true, Satan. The truth is, thou shalt not tempt the Lord thy God." Jesus demonstrated by His example that we should live only by the words that proceed out of the mouth of God. We can take the first step toward defeating temptation by refusing to put ourselves into a place where we listen to Satan's lies.

God has provided the ultimate solution: the lamb of God, as the sacrifice of God, bore every one of our "X's" in His body on the cross. By dying on the cross, He became our righteousness, our sanity. We now can be righteous and have the power of overcoming sin through Jesus Christ. God obliterates our sins in the blood of the Lamb. In the blood of Jesus there is tremendous power. Not just power to wash a blackboard with our past sins written all over it, but power to keep us from future sins.

When it comes to living the Christian life, we put our lives where our heads are, so to speak. What we believe is what we will do. The fellow who lights a cigarette and smokes it, despite the warnings of the Surgeon General's report, believes that it is more important to inhale his pleasure today than to be healthy tomorrow. He may wholly agree with what the Surgeon General prints on the package, but he lights up anyway. If he believed that he would drop dead instantly from that very cigarette, would he light it? If you were to stand beside him with a gun aimed at his temple and tell him if he smoked that cigarette you would pull the trigger, chances are he wouldn't do it. He would show some self-control. But right now nothing stops him and he tells himself the lie, 'One more won't hurt me'....

When you are in a difficult situation, ask yourself three questions:

(1) What am I telling myself about this situation?

(2) What does God say about the situation?

(3) Do I agree with what God says?

You will know what God says if you have been studying it, hearing it in church and meditating on it. So then you must ask yourself, do I agree with it?

The Word tells you, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13). The Word tells you that if friends and family forsake you, He will never leave you. Admit, "Yes, Lord. I receive those words as truth. Your Word is truth. I will accept your Word with all my heart and soul."

Then trust the Word. Even though your friend abandoned you when you needed him, The Word of God is present to rescue you.

When you believe what God says in His Word is true and workable, you can act on it. This is how you overcome sin. You act on the Word of God because you know it; you accept it as truth and trust it.

"Easier said than done," you say. Yes, sometimes you may feel compelled to argue with God. Sometimes you may actually get mad at God. (But you don't tell anyone, of course. Instead you mistreat yourself and everyone around you.)

You tell God by your actions, "How come you haven't made me rich like you said you would?" or "How come you haven't corrected this loneliness in my life?" or "Why haven't you given me a job yet?" or "How come you haven't healed me yet?" If something is wrong the problem must be God. It couldn't be you—could it?

The problem, most likely, is your beliefs. You know what God says and yet you argue with Him and tell yourself, 'But I'm only human—I've got my needs. I can't live like a monk or nun. I must have these diversions once in a while. God made me with these needs, so He should understand.' You're certain that you know what is good for you. God doesn't...

How can you have the right belief? Right belief comes about when you honestly and openly face the wrong beliefs you have allowed to fester in your mind, and when you choose to act on the truth. (p.29-31, 39-41)

I'd like to quote from a very fine article on the subject "**How You Can Overcome Sin's Deadly Power**" by Richard Rice which appeared in the March 1982 Good News magazine. In it he discusses how sin is not just an act of breaking God's law but a force we know as human nature - habitual tendencies which have a momentum of their own. He discusses just how we break the momentum of these bad habits and get them out of our lives. He writes:

Sin is a living, dynamic force in human nature! It is actually a law—a law as real and certain as the law of gravity.

The apostle Paul was very much aware of sin's power when he wrote about the “law of sin which is in my members” (Rom. 7:23).

The apostle John also understood the nature of sin, and wrote, “If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8).

If we fail to comprehend this little understood truth about sin, we will continue to lose in our daily battles with it.

We tend to think of sin as simply an act of disobedience, and fail to recognize that sin is a law or cancerous condition that reigns in our bodies. Outward acts of sin are only symptoms of the greater disease within. We must lay the ax to the root of the tree if we are to achieve total victory.

If sin exists in our very nature, is there any lasting hope of conquering it? Yes! Paul exhorted, “Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof” (Rom. 6:12).

Paul further declared, “I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me” (Phil. 4:13).

We cannot conquer sin on our own, but God will provide the power we need. But first, before we can successfully reckon with sin, we must see sin for what it is.

Sin Has Power

You know you shouldn't sin, but you find yourself succumbing to sin's lures and temptations time and again.

“But how can this be?” you may ask. Perhaps you are baptized, and think: When I was baptized I thought I was cleansed of my sins and that they would never emerge again. Yet I am still plagued with the lusts and temptations of my former life.

If you ask yourself this question, then you do not fully understand the nature of sin.

It is true that when you were baptized, the slate was wiped clean. You were justified before God and all your past sins were forgiven. But baptism did not remove the energy and power of sin that remained in your nature. As we shall see, it is this lingering power of sin within us that we must deal with and overcome.

You need to understand how sin works as a dynamic power within your nature—and how to overcome it! A number of analogies from nature demonstrate how sin works.

“For example, we know how one spot of decay on an apple will eventually cause the entire fruit to rot. Rust in a few spots on a car, if not repaired, will in time destroy the value of the entire automobile. Similarly, one cancer cell, if not contained, will spread through the body till vital organs are reached, bringing death.

That's power! And sin, unless controlled and conquered, has the same power to destroy us—for eternity.

Perhaps the most graphic analogy in all creation of how sin works is that of leaven. Leaven starts small—just a pinch of yeast will leaven an entire loaf of bread (Gal. 5:9). But, because leaven is a living organism, it soon grows and spreads through all the dough, actually changing and assimilating to its own nature the original dough with which it is mixed.

Sin, too, starts small—with our first wrong thought. If we allow this thought to linger in our mind, it will grow into a strong temptation or desire. Then, if we give the temptation or desire enough time, it will become uncontrollable and overpower our will to resist. Left weak and defenceless, we will succumb to the temptation and sin.

James 1:13-15 explains this process in a simple but powerful way: “Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man: But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin: and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.”

But sin doesn't stop there. With each succeeding act of sin that we commit, the sin will pick up momentum and strength, eventually searing our conscience. The sinful act will then become an enthralling, pleasurable habit. This will lead to self-will, hardness of heart and outright rebellion against God.

Once the sin is firmly established, it will open the way for other sins to enter. And eventually our whole heart, mind and being will become corrupted.

The end result of sin, then, is total disintegration of righteous character so that we cannot and will not repent—the unpardonable sin:

"For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, And have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come, If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame" (Heb. 6:4-6).

Sin, then, like leaven or yeast, has the power to permeate our entire being. Is it any wonder, then, that God builds the second of His seven annual festivals, which show His plan of redemption for mankind, around this analogy of leaven? The Days of Unleavened Bread picture our responsibility to completely eliminate sin—spiritual leaven—from our lives (I Cor. 5:7-8).

After our sins have been forgiven through repentance and application of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, pictured by the Passover, the first festival, we must strive to overcome this power of sin that still influences our nature. This requires us to remain in a constant state of repenting, because we will stumble and sin again on occasion—we must daily ask God to again apply Christ's sacrifice to atone for our sins.

Satan the devil also plays a role in perpetuating this destructive power of sin. After all, he is the author and instigator of sin—the actual living force behind it—the one who gives sin its life and energy. Satan broadcasts the thoughts, attitudes, lusts and temptations that arouse within us the desires to break God's laws. Satan works in the disobedient (Eph. 2:2).

Thus we are confronted with a two-fold battle—that of abstaining “from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul” (1 Pet. 2:11) and that of resisting Satan the devil (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

The Key To Overcoming

We are born into a world filled with temptations and sin. We become subject to a carnal nature before we even know it. We often refer to this as human nature—or it could be defined as the power of sin.

But now we come to a vital distinction. After repentance and baptism, even though we still have a carnal nature that works in our members, we also have received another nature—a new, spiritual nature from God. Notice how Pastor General Herbert W. Armstrong explains this significant truth in his booklet, *What Do You Mean—The Unpardonable Sin?*:

"God's Holy Spirit within you is the presence of a new nature—a different nature — you are now a partaker of the divine nature (2 Pet. 1:4). The nature that not only wants to be good—but wants to do righteousness. But, mark this well!

The reception of God's divine nature within us did not remove the old human nature, with its pulls and temptations. Nor will the human nature be completely removed until the resurrection, and change into spirit composition—until you are no longer composed of matter, but of spirit."

Clearly, we now have two natures co-existing side by side, but these two natures are diametrically opposed to each other: “For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would” (Gal. 5:17, see also Rom. 6:11-22).

The battle of the Christian life, then, revolves around the struggle between these two natures. Many Christians stumble, become discouraged with their lack of spiritual progress and fall. Not fully realizing that sin is a power that is energized within them by Satan, they easily fall prey to their own lusts and Satan's devices.

The key to winning the battle over sin is simple: We must feed our spiritual nature and starve the sinful one. And we are not left to battle by ourselves!

We have an advocate with God— Jesus Christ the righteous (1 John 2:1)—who intervenes for us. Jesus sits at God's right hand in heaven to plead our cause and to pour out mercy and forgiveness—we have access to God's throne and God's help (Heb. 4:15-16). But God is also dwelling in us by the Holy Spirit, and that is our hope of victory and glory (Gal. 2:20, Col. 1:27).

We overcome, by the blood of the Lamb, Satan's evil accusations (Rev. 12:11), becoming free from sin. And we are enabled to walk blameless before God with increasing spiritual strength and power by the very life of Jesus in us, which saves us (Rom. 5:10).

The process of overcoming sin, then, involves rejecting the things of Satan and growing in the nature of Christ.

Feed The Spiritual Nature

Just as our physical body needs daily food to sustain energy, strength and health, so it is with our spiritual life. We need spiritual food to derive the strength to fight our foes.

Here are some practical steps that will provide us with a concentrated diet of spiritual food:

- **Bible study.** Jesus Christ said, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God' (Matt. 4:4). Our purpose in Bible study should be to so saturate our minds with God's thoughts that we will instantly be ready to combat Satan, the world and our own flesh.

By filling our hearts and minds with the Word of God, we will reinforce our ability to resist the forces of evil and to strive steadily toward God's Kingdom. We are to be literally washed by the Word of God (Eph. 5:26).

- **Prayer.** We must be in a constant state of prayer. Paul told the Romans to continue 'instant [constantly diligent] in prayer' (Rom. 12:12). In order for God's strength and life to flow into us, it's imperative that we keep in daily contact with God. Our spiritual strength is thus renewed each day (II Cor. 4:16). If we walk closely with God, God will give us the help to conquer.

- **Meditation.** David found that meditating on God's law day and night was one of his greatest sources of strength: 'O how love I thy law! it is my meditation all the day. Thou through thy commandments hast made me wiser than mine enemies: for they are ever with me. I have more understanding than all my teachers: for thy testimonies are my meditation' (Ps. 119:97-99).

Meditation, coupled with the power of God's Holy Spirit, opens for us new realms of understanding. Meditation is a process of assimilating the Word of God, the bread of life. The more our minds are filled with spiritual truth, the less room there will be for Satan to enter.

- **Sermons and Bible studies.** God's ministry is commissioned to feed God's flock (John 21:15-17). God's ministers have been specially trained to expound and enlarge the meaning of the Scriptures. When we attend services with a keen desire to learn God's truth, we will discover rich gems of knowledge—tools of spiritual warfare—we could never find on our own (Rom. 10:14).

- **Fellowship with God's people.** Frequent fellowship with brethren of like faith provides a wealth of spiritual food and motivation.

Hebrews 3:13 commands, 'But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.'

We must always strive to keep our fellowship and conversation positive, edifying and encouraging each other at every opportune moment (Gal. 6:1-2, 6, 10). By mingling with brethren who are close to God and filled with His Spirit, we will absorb much spiritual strength (Rom. 1:11-12).

- **God's Holy Spirit.** The bottom line to winning the victory over sin and Satan lies with God's Holy Spirit, where we get our true power for battle (Eph. 3:16-20, Rom. 8:1-4). Ephesians 5:18 commands us to 'be filled with the Spirit.'

In every prayer, we should ask God to give us a renewed supply of His Spirit. When we are filled with God's Spirit, there remains no place for sin to enter or Satan to work.

Starve Sin And Satan

The secret to conquering our sinful nature is to cut off its "food supply". In other words, we must starve it to death. To the degree that we accomplish this feat—starving our sinful nature, but feeding the spiritual—we will overcome and win the victory over sin.

Here are steps to overcoming sin:

- **Bring every thought into captivity.** Paul exhorts us to bring "into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5). This requires a high degree of discipline.

Guard the door of your mind and examine every thought. Allow nothing to enter except what is pure and clean in God's eyes (Phil. 4:8). Follow the lead of God's Spirit and develop a right conscience. Don't rationalize with temptation, but crush it immediately. Keep up your defenses at all times (Prov. 16:32) and look to God for help.

- **Flee from temptation.** We are commanded to "Flee fornication" (1 Cor. 6:18). Jesus Christ revealed the urgency of getting away from sin in His instruction to pluck out our eye or cut off our right hand if they tempt us to sin (Matt. 5:29-30). Of course, He was using a powerful figure of speech; He did not mean we should literally cut off our hand or pluck out our eye. Our hands and eyes only obey our mind and do not by themselves lead us into sin.

Colossians 3:5 shows what Jesus was literally telling us to cut out. We should either remove ourselves immediately from the scene of temptation or take whatever means are necessary to choke off the power of temptation's influence.

Do you take a second or third look at something or some situation that you know to be wrong? If so, you are feeding your sinful nature and playing into the hands of the enemy. Grab yourself by the collar and run as far away as possible! Don't look back, leer or linger—quickly cast out the wrong thought.

- **Control your natural drives.** God gave us our five senses to enjoy the good things of life in a balanced, wholesome way. But when we indulge them to excess, the power of sin begins to exert itself and take over. God commands us to be temperate, or moderate, in all things (2 Pet. 1:6). Master yourself and never allow physical lusts to take preeminence.

- **Control your temper.** Giving vent to uncontrolled anger is one of the surest ways to let the devil find access into your mind. “Be ye angry, and sin not: let not the sun go down upon your wrath: Neither give place to the devil” (Eph. 4:26-27).

Determine to keep a cool head and a steady disposition. Try to anticipate problem situations and avoid or neutralize them. The key is to remain close to God so that, with His Holy Spirit, you can constantly be alert and use the power of instant self-control.

- **Love not the world.** This society is the devil's playground—a carnival-like atmosphere designed to arouse unholy lusts and distractions for a Christian. Even though we must live in this sinful world, we should remember that we are God's people and not be drawn into the world's wicked practices (Rom. 12:2).

John wrote: “Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever” (1 John 2:15-17).

Clearly, the battle lines are drawn. We must resist and reject the lures and lusts of the world and Satan as though our lives depended on it. For, spiritually speaking, they do—eternally!

Sin is more sinister and pervasive than just an act of disobedience against God's law. Sin is a power or law that works in our very members. Overcoming, then, is the process of nourishing God's nature within ourselves and starving human nature. This calls for constant self-discipline and making use of God's power.

By God's power, we are enabled to overcome. And, with God's power, we will!”

Along the same lines as Richard Rice's article I would like to quote a few extracts from Herbert W. Armstrong's reprint article entitled “How to Be an Overcomer” which focuses on how we can overcome our more stubborn, besetting sins. He writes:

Do YOU have some 'besetting sin' — some point of weakness, perhaps even secret, you have been unable to overcome?

Have you ever met temptation, struggled with it, only to wake up a little later to the remorseful fact that you had slipped and fallen, and failed to overcome?

Or perhaps you are struggling with some habit that holds you as its slave—struggling, wrestling, always fighting it, yet somehow never able to conquer it...

God's Word promises: "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man, but God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will also MAKE THE WAY OF ESCAPE, that you may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13).

But has it not often seemed, in your experience, that God has failed to keep this promise?

Temptation has come. You have struggled, even prayed, yet you were overpowered, and you did not find the way of escape! What is wrong?

Jesus said, "I will NEVER leave you nor forsake you." "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." God's Word promises, "Sin shall NOT have dominion over you."

Yet have you not found that sin has had DOMINION over you, holding you its slave? Have you not fought it desperately even with tears streaming down your face —only to fail?

WHY? What is wrong? Simply that we have not known how to receive, apply and use the FAITH God promises to give!

First, there is something WE must do. Some go to one extreme and try to do it all. Others swing to the opposite extreme, plead with God, make little effort themselves and expect Him to do it all.

James says: "Submit to God. Resist the devil and he will flee from you" (James 4:7).

Submit! Resist! This takes effort.

Peter says, "to humble ourselves, casting ALL our care upon the Lord, and to be sober and VIGILANT, because the devil is walking about, watching for the chance to tempt us when we are off our guard. We should RESIST him, steadfast in the faith" (1 Peter 5:6-9).

We are to resist Satan, and do it in the faith of Christ — but HOW ?

The key to it all is BE VIGILANT. Be on your guard! Be ever watchful! Be prepared! That's where we fall down! It takes constant, continuous, vigilant effort, never letting down!

Unless we, ourselves, had to put forth some effort we could not be OVERCOMERS! But if we had power to do it all, we should not need God! So it requires our effort—our continuous, watchful, ever VIGILANT effort — empowered by GOD'S SPIRIT!

James continues, "Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:8).

Now we are getting closer to our answer! When temptation comes, WE ARE TOO FAR FROM GOD—and we are then unable, SUDDENLY, on the spur of the moment, to get close enough to Him to get the help and the deliverance we need!

It sometimes takes TIME to get CLOSE to God— into that intimate contact with Him so that we can draw on Him for the power we suddenly need!

In other words, when temptation unexpectedly has come, we have found ourselves caught off guard—out of prayer—out of contact with God—OUT OF SPIRITUAL TRAINING!

You were entering a CONTEST with Satan the devil. You tried to wrestle with him, but you were OUT OF TRAINING, out of spiritual condition.

Suppose a prizefighter would suddenly find himself, untrained and unprepared, in the ring in a contest with the world's heavyweight champion! Do you think any living man could win?

How much STRONGER is Satan, by comparison? No wonder we fail! Could such a fighter, who had been dissipating, carousing, weakening himself physically, SUDDENLY summon enough strength and skill to conquer the champion of the world? Could a mile runner run a successful race and win, unless he trained and prepared himself carefully for the race—unless he were IN CONDITION when it came?

We can no more win these SPIRITUAL battles when out of SPIRITUAL training. All spiritual power and strength must come from God. We can drink it in from Him only when we are IN CONTACT with Him — close to Him — in communion with Him!

Otherwise, when the temptations suddenly assail you, no matter how hard you then try, or cry out to God for help, you are simply TOO FAR AWAY FROM HIM to get help!

Spiritual training, to get and KEEP in constant vigilant condition to meet the foe of temptation and sin, requires continuous, earnest, persistent PRAYER! That is why we are commanded to PRAY WITHOUT CEASING! To KEEP IT UP!

If we draw nigh to God, and then KEEP close to Him, our problem will be solved. We will then have the FAITH. We will then be FILLED with His Spirit — His power to overcome.

We can keep in spiritual training only if we keep our affections—our minds—our thoughts—on SPIRITUAL things.

Read Colossians 3:1-10. Most of us keep our minds filled with earthly, material cares, turning to the spiritual only occasionally! Seek FIRST the Kingdom of God and His RIGHTEOUSNESS!

Sometimes it takes a siege of FASTING AND PRAYER — earnest, determined, persevering prayer — seeking God with all our might—with weeping—staying with it, DETERMINED, until we get through. Then we must keep in CONTINUOUS prayer.

Cast ALL our cares upon HIM. We are not doing that. If we do, there will be many things each day to pray about! And it takes daily PRIVATE prayer, in real earnest, besides family prayer. Is eternal life WORTH IT?

To conclude this discourse on the seven deadly sins I would like to quote from a very fine sermon given in 1986 by Mr Bob Morton entitled **“Conquered by God”** which looks at the attitude we all must have if we are to get anywhere in defeating these most troublesome sins. To this day it is one of the finest sermons that I have ever heard. Mr Morton has these things to say:

Brethren, we must become converted - that is change from what we are and become something totally different....Now to accomplish this brethren, a certain attitude is required if we're going to put sin out of our lives. Jesus Christ talked about this kind of attitude in a number of parables but I want to pick two to start off with.

In Matthew 13:44 Christ talked about a man who happened to be walking through a field one day and his foot struck something and he fell over. As he got up and he saw a glint and started to remove the turf and the grass he found something and this is what Christ said about him in this verse, “And again the kingdom of heaven is like treasure hidden in a field which a man found and when he found it he hid it again and for joy for what he found he goes and sells all that he has and buys that field.” You see, brethren, here is a man who discovered something that was so infinitely priceless to him, so valuable that he decided to buy that field so that he might have it.

The hidden treasure what Christ is talking about here, of course, is the knowledge of the truth, the calling God has given us, the goal and the purpose of human life and He says our reaction needs to be the same joy and the same excitement by which we are willing to go and give everything up we have for what God is giving us and again in the second paragraph in verse 45 He says this, “The kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls who when he found a pearl of great price.”

Now I was reading a story about pearls, about how they were produced today and in olden times and the story took you back to the days of the ancient Arab Middle East traders who traded down along the African coast and the coast of the Persian Gulf where pearls were discovered and it told of the great excitement of the pearl market where pearl traders would sit around and haggle over for hours and hours, sometimes over just one pearl in fact, a perfectly formed pearl of a certain size and a certain lustre was one of the most valuable things a human being could stumble over and here is a story of a trader who knew pearls - he knew what was valuable and one day he spied one in someone's hand at an auction market he decided that it was so beautiful that he wanted to possess it, not just as an investment - he just wanted it to be his own. He considered it to be so beautiful and so priceless that 'he went and sold all that he had and he bought it.'

In these two parables an attitude is being described, an attitude of an overwhelming desire to possess and have what they had found and what Jesus Christ is telling us here is that the kingdom of God is just like that and that our

desire to be there in the kingdom of God needs to be just the same. It needs to be a very powerful, overwhelming desire.

Jesus Christ has set us a goal. He has offered us something that is so infinitely priceless and so precious that our attitude needs to be the same attitude you find depicted in these two parables. In fact, Christ told each of us what that goal is in Matthew 5:48. You see these two men had to go and sell everything they had for what they had discovered.

Well, we also have to do something in order to have and achieve what Christ is offering us. And so in verse 48 He tells us what it is we must do. He says, "Therefore you shall become perfect just as your Father in heaven is perfect." You see, brethren, this is the goal He has set for us. It is the goal of becoming perfect like God.

Now in order to do this we must develop God's holy righteous character, a character that wants to live by God's holy, righteous, spiritual law and brethren this is what we must achieve, not alone, not without the help of God but it is something we must achieve if we're going to qualify for the single most important thing we can do in this life - that is to enter into the Kingdom of God at the return of Jesus Christ and brethren this is something we are told to seek, to seek earnestly, to seek diligently and to seek first and foremost in our lives above every other thing.

Let's go to the next chapter in verse 33 where Christ says, "Seek first." Now, brethren, that means seek it ahead of everything else, put it first in your life, put it foremost in your life, make it the thing that you sacrifice everything for, do this ahead of everything. He says, "Seek first the kingdom of God' and then He tells us how to do this by seeking first 'His righteousness and all these things will be added to you.'" In other words Christ will give us the kingdom of God and we will qualify for the kingdom of God and enter that kingdom at Christ's return.

Brethren, if we are going to qualify then this must be our primary goal in life above everything else and unless it does then we have no guarantee we'll be there. Let's look back in Matthew, chapter 5 and in verse 6 where Christ illustrates it over and over and over again in different ways, in ways we can grasp and understand.

In Matthew, chapter 5 and verse 6 He puts it this way. He says, "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled." Now the type of hungering and thirsting Jesus Christ is talking about here is not the way we feel after we've missed a meal, it's not the way we feel at the end of the day when we're about to sit down for dinner, it's not even the way we feel at the end of the day of Atonement, here He's talking about the type of hunger only a starving man knows and the type of thirst a man dying of thirst can possibly understand.

He is talking about an intense, gnawing, aching, longing for God's righteousness, an intense desire to live God's way of life, to obey His laws and to acquire what He is offering us...

Now Jesus Christ takes this in the book of Luke in referring to one of these occasions which we've already read, He takes the coin over and contrasts in Luke, chapter 6,

verse 25. Notice what He says in what appears to be a second version of the Sermon on the Mount but Luke adds one thing when He says, "Woe to you who are full now for you shall hunger and woe to you who laugh now for you shall weep." What did He mean brethren? Well, He meant woe to us if we're satisfied with what we have, woe to us if we're content with the way we are, woe to us if we don't intensely desire to live God's way of life and obey Him and woe to us if we're content to just cruise along and not put any pressure on ourselves.

He's saying we may live happily now but the day will come when we realize our lack. That day will be when God's people enter into the Kingdom of God. Jesus Christ back in the book of Matthew illustrated even further in chapter 11, verse 12. Let's just look at a couple of more of these illustrating a kind of attitude we need to have to put sin out of our lives.

Notice what He says here in Matthew 11, verse 12. "And from the days of John the Baptist to now the kingdom of heaven suffers violence and men of violence take it by force." What did He mean? - That people were going to wrest the kingdom off God and possess it themselves? No, that's impossible. Those who do enter the kingdom, who are qualifying to enter the kingdom is for those who want it so much they're willing to fight for it, not fight Jesus Christ, not fight God but fight themselves, fight their own lack of desire, fight their own spiritual inertia.

You see brethren these scriptures that I have read highlight something, they highlight what really is one of the chief causes of failure among God's people, one of the biggest barriers all of us face and that barrier is the barrier of not wanting it enough....

Now brethren, why is it we lack this desire that Jesus Christ is talking about. Well, the answer to that question is also the answer to why it is that we have so much trouble obeying God and putting sin out of our lives and after all isn't that what the Feast of Unleavened Bread is all about.

It's about putting sin out of our lives. It's about coming out of this world's ways and there's a reason why we have so much difficulty putting sin out of our lives and its the same reason why we lack the desire Jesus Christ is talking about him.

There is a fundamental principle in God's word brethren that we all need to understand....That fundamental principle is the attitude described by Mr Armstrong so many times - the attitude of being conquered by God.

What Mr Armstrong went through is what every single one of us must go through in order to begin to put sin out of our lives in any serious or real way.

You see Mr Armstrong described it again and again as being totally and completely crushed and conquered by God with his will being totally surrendered to God's will, with the vanity, with the spirit of resistance, with the desire for self will and independence completely crushed out of him.

Now brethren, that is the attitude we all must come to before we can truly obey God and that is the attitude that is pictured and symbolized in the verses quoted before. It is the attitude of being conquered by the Creator of the universe.

Now what brethren do we mean by being conquered by God? Now that if we don't be careful can become a cliché that we use.

Now what do we mean by being conquered by God? To answer that question let's ask another question. What is God's attitude? Have you ever stopped to answer that? Does God really want to sin but because He has such great power He's able to resist it and He's so powerful that He doesn't give in? Is that what God's attitude is? No, that's not true.

You see brethren sin is absolutely abhorrent to God. God does not want to sin. God has no such desire to sin. God hates sin more than He hates anything else. God desires and loves holiness and righteousness. That's what He loves, that's what He desires and that's what He does. Now what about you?

Do you have the same attitude God has or do you find yourself wanting to be a part of this world? If you're a man do you find yourself wanting to look at women other than your wife or steal a glance at the pornography in the magazine rack or watch torrid bedroom scenes on TV and find yourself having to strive against that desire?

Well brethren, if you do you have not been conquered by God. You don't have His attitude. You see the self will, the vanity, the resistance to God's will has never been crushed out of us, your will then has never been totally surrendered to God's will. And if that is the case you do not have the mind of Christ or the attitudes Christ described in the scriptures we read.

Now brethren, what I'm trying to say is this - we cannot want to sin even though we might strive to resist it.

We cannot want to sin and hunger and thirst for God's righteousness at the same time. We either have one attitude or we have the other. We cannot have both of them.

Now the Bible illustrates this in many ways brethren and this is what I want to talk about this afternoon. I want to talk about what it means to be conquered by God because if we have not been completely and totally conquered by God then we're going to have great difficulty putting sin out of our lives. In fact, we may be able to stop smoking, start tithing, begin keeping the holy days and the Sabbath and do a number of things and resist and fight and strive against our desire to do those things and force ourselves to do right things and still not have the attitude God has.

Brethren, what is your attitude when you examined yourself before Passover? What did you find or what were you even looking for? Did you find an attitude that had been totally conquered by God? Did you find an attitude in which the self will, the vanity had been crushed? Did you find an attitude in which all desire for your own way has gone?

Did you find an attitude that is earnestly hungering and thirsting for God's righteousness that wants to obey God's laws and wants to know what that law is, that wants to go as far as it possibly can in obedience to that law or on the other hand did you find a different attitude, an attitude that wants to get into the Kingdom of God but at the same time wants what this world has to offer, an attitude that

wants eternal life but also wants to go as far as it possibly can in the wrong direction as God will allow?....

Do you tithe because you have to or do you tithe because you have come to want to because it's a part of God's way of life and you want God's way of life? Do you give because you have to or give because you want to help others which is what tithing is all about?...

Notice what Christ says in Matthew 6:22, "The lamp of the body is the eye". Now what is He referring to here? Well, if you put all the scriptures together on the subject you'll find the Bible uses the eye to symbolize the attitude of mind....He is saying "if you're eye" or your attitude "is good"....You see, God's way of life is not a smorgasbord.

We can't want some of God's way and reject the rest. We've got to want it all. Christ says "if you're attitude is good"...."your whole lives will be full of light." Your lives will be full of spiritual light, with righteousness. You will want to go God's way. You will not want to sin. Sin will be absolutely abhorrent to you! You will hate sin like God hates sin!...In verse 23 he says "but if you're eye is bad". In other words if we have the attitude of wanting to go in the wrong direction as far as you can but still be right with God, of maybe wanting to keep the letter of the law but not keep the spiritual intent of the law, He says "if you're eye is bad your whole body will be full of darkness"...

You see...Christianity is not for those who are interested, it is not for those who just want to fellowship with those of like mind nor is it for those who are attracted to the teachings of the church. It is for those who want to live the way of life that God lives, the way of love, of outgoing concern for others. It is for those who want to live that way of life more than anything in their whole life....

I want to illustrate this another way by a story I once heard about three men who applied for a chauffeur's job and their job was to be a chauffeur of a very important rich magnate and they called them all in one after another and tested them over and over again....and they came down to just three men. They'd eliminated all the rest and so they decided to find out which one would be best at protecting the life of the man riding in the back seat so they asked them all one question and they took them out to a gravel road which came right around to the edge of a cliff.

They asked them, "How close could you drive to the edge of that cliff and still be safe?" The first one looked at it, thought about it and said, "Four inches". The second one after being asked the same question said, "Six inches".

Then they called the third one and asked him the same question, "How close could you drive to the edge of that cliff and still be safe? We want to know if you're a good enough driver to protect the man we're going to have you drive around." The man looked at it and said, "I wouldn't go closer than six feet." He said, "I'd probably be crazy to do that but I wouldn't even go closer than twelve feet." And then they said to him, "OK, you're the one who's got the job."

You see brethren, that's the way we've got to be with God's law. The man said, "I'm going to keep as far from that cliff as I possibly can. I'm not going to be

that foolish.” We’ve got to realize brethren that we too have got to have that same attitude towards sin....

Now brethren, if you have been totally conquered by God you will want His ways. You will find you won’t have to struggle against the desire for what this world has to offer. You’ll hate sin. We’re talking about something which comes after years of seeking God.

Jesus Christ never sinned, not because He had the willpower not to but because He hates sin and God says in Phillipians 2:5 to let Christ’s mind be in you and if you will seek it you will be able to put sin out of your life.