

Sin and Morality



RCIA Handouts:

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The Differences in Sins

There are two major kinds of sin: original and actual.

Original sin is the deprivation of original holiness and justice that Adam and Eve transmitted to all human beings because of their first sin. As a result of original sin, human nature is weakened in its powers and subject to ignorance, suffering, death and the inclination to sin (called “concupiscence”).

Actual sin is sin which people commit. There are two kinds of actual sin – mortal and venial. They are evaluated according to their gravity.

Mortal sin is a horrible offense against God, so horrible that it destroys the life of grace in the soul. Three simultaneous conditions must be fulfilled for a mortal sin.

1. The act must be something very serious or “grave”. Grave matter is specified by the Ten Commandments.
 - I. Do not have strange gods before me.
 - II. Do not take the name of the Lord in vain.
 - III. Keep the Lord’s Day holy.
 - IV. Honor your mother and father.
 - V. Do not kill.
 - VI. Do not commit adultery.
 - VII. Do not steal.
 - VIII. Do not bear false witness.
 - IX. Do not desire your neighbor’s wife.
 - X. Do not desire your neighbor’s goods.
2. The person must have sufficient understanding of what is being done.
3. The person must have sufficient freedom of the will.

So I cannot commit a mortal sin if the matter is not serious (e.g. if I stole a small amount of money from my employer) or if I did not know what I was doing (e.g. if I were to hurt someone accidentally or unthinkingly), or if I did not act with full freedom (e.g. I was under physical or emotional pressure).

Venial sin is a less serious matter. I commit venial sin when I do not observe the standard prescribed by the moral law or when I disobey the moral law in a grave matter, but without full knowledge or without complete consent. Deliberate and unrepented venial sin disposes us little by little to commit mortal sin.

The Seven Deadly Sins

Last updated: February 11, 2003 First appeared: June 18, 1996

"Sin creates [an inclination] to sin; it engenders vice by repetition of the same acts. This results in perverse inclinations which cloud conscience and corrupt the concrete judgment of good and evil. Thus sin tends to reproduce itself and reinforce itself, but it cannot destroy the moral sense at its root." *Para. 1865, Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1994*

Why bother?

Before even beginning a discussion of these Seven Deadly Sins, also known as "capital sins," it may be useful to discuss a few differences among Christians on this subject. Some people feel it is better to take a more positive approach to faith and not dwell on sin. Others believe all sin is equally repugnant to God, and so any classification of sins is wrong. Still others just want to forget the whole thing since they are saved and God loves them and really doesn't care about all this "stuff."

Inscribed in ancient times at the [Oracle at Delphi](#): "Know thyself." Self-knowledge follows closely behind the knowledge of God, and self-knowledge for anyone means knowledge of sin. "My own heart shows me the way of the ungodly." Scripture says we are all sinners, and we don't mind as long as the sins are nameless and faceless. When we name a sin found in ourselves (by Grace) it is as though we are confronted in the back alleys of our souls with furtive saboteurs and muggers who seek to prevent our union with God. The sudden self-revelation of a serious fault is one thing: the discovery of a deadly sin which we hate very much in others is worse. It is like finding out a spouse is unfaithful, or worse, that we have been blindly unfaithful to the Spouse of our soul.

The following pages on the deadly sins may lead to horrible discoveries. Bear in mind:

1. Friends will almost never volunteer this information.
2. If they do, we will not accept it.
3. God forgives anything, even repeatedly, so do not be afraid.

A combination of good spiritual reading (nothing too recent), nearly constant prayer, and reflection on the repetitive patterns of life works well for naming our sins. Remarks made in job performance reviews and conversations with people who dislike us are especially revealing. Our enemies usually lack the false charity to deny our sins. No wonder we are called to love them.

The List of Capital (Deadly) Sins

The table below lists The Seven Deadly Sins (vices) in the traditional order with the virtues against which they are sins. The list of sins goes back at least to Pope St. Gregory the Great and St. John Cassian, but the Bible proscribes them all. If one or more of these doesn't seem like a big sin to you, it almost certainly means you have already rationalized it. Work on that one first. By the way, there is no set list of Virtues corresponding to these. I've just listed the ones that made sense at the time

Vice	Virtue against which it sins	Brief description
<u>Pride</u> (1)	<u>Humility</u>	Seeing ourselves as we are and not comparing ourselves to others is humility. Pride and vanity are competitive. If someone else's pride really bothers you, you have a lot of pride.
<u>Avarice/Greed</u> (5)	<u>Generosity</u>	This is about more than money. Generosity means letting others get the credit or praise. It is giving without having expectations of the other person. Greed wants to get its "fair share" or a bit more.

<u>Envy</u> (2)	Love	"Love is patient, love is kind..." Love actively seeks the good of others for their sake. Envy resents the good others receive or even might receive. Envy is almost indistinguishable from pride at times.
<u>Wrath/Anger</u> (3)	Kindness	Kindness means taking the tender approach, with patience and compassion. Anger is often our first reaction to this. to the problems of others. Impatience with the faults of others is related to this.
<u>Lust</u> (7)	Self control	Self control and self mastery prevent pleasure from killing the soul by suffocation. Legitimate pleasures are controlled in the same way an athlete's muscles are: for maximum efficiency without damage. Lust is the self-destructive drive for pleasure out of proportion to its worth. Sex, power, or image can be used well, but they tend to go out of control.
<u>Gluttony</u> (6)	Faith and Temperance	Temperance accepts the natural limits of pleasures and preserves this natural balance. This does not pertain only to food, but to entertainment and other legitimate goods, and even the company of others.
<u>Sloth</u> (4)	<u>Zeal</u>	Zeal is the energetic response of the heart to God's commands. The other sins work together to deaden the

		spiritual senses so we first become slow to respond to God and then drift completely into the sleep of complacency.
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Origins

The Seven Deadly Sins never occur as a formal list in the Bible. Some people say they can all be found in Matthew's Gospel (chapters 5 through 7), but they are not in a simple list there. These sins were identified as a group around the same time as the Bible was being translated into a single language. Rather than these sins being identified in a single place in the Bible, they are found all through it, from Genesis to Revelation. The letters of the New Testament mention all of these, and many others as well. The Catechism has many Scriptural references in the section that lists the "Seven Deadly Sins." It is well to remember that the Scriptures come from the Jewish and Christian Churches, not the other way around. In both cases, faith preceded the writing.