

## Envy

### I. Definitions.

- A. envy: *trans.* To feel displeasure and ill-will at the superiority of (another person) in happiness, success, reputation, or the possession of anything desirable; to regard with discontent another's possession of (some superior advantage which one would like to have for oneself).
- B. covetousness: 1. Strong or inordinate desire (of). *Obs.* 2. Inordinate and culpable desire of possessing that which belongs to another or to which one has no right.
- C. emulate: 1. *trans.* Of persons: To strive to equal or rival (a person, his achievements or qualities); to copy or imitate with the object of equalling or excelling. 4. *trans.* To desire to rival (a person, his fortune, achievements, etc.); hence, to be jealous of, envy, feel a grudge against. *Obs.*
  - 1. Emulation may be positive. **ROM 11:14.**
  - 2. Emulation may be negative. **GAL 5:20.**
  - 3. The same Greek word translated “emulations” in **GAL 5:20** is also rendered as various forms of “envy” in at least six places. E.g. **ACT 13:45; 2CO 12:20.**

### II. (**JAM 4:5**) Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?

- A. This is a general conclusion of Scripture's message, like **GAL 3:22.**
- B. Self-willed religion is vain (**JAM 1:26**) but not the warnings throughout Scripture against lust and envy.
- C. Lust of the eyes invited sin's entrance (**GEN 3:6**); envy invited the first murder. **1JO 3:12.**
- D. This is the spirit of the world with which we should not be friends. **JAM 4:4; 1CO 2:12.**
  - 1. Since “A friend loveth at all times...” (**PRO 17:17**), friendship with envy will always defend it.
  - 2. Envy will thus be excused, rationalized or denied as a destructive, sinful force.
  - 3. (**JAM 3:14**) But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.
- E. Since envy is activated by distinctions of preference, the only thing that could eliminate any possibility of envy in the corrupted creation would be uniform evenness in everything: abilities, opportunities, possessions, outcomes, etc.
  - 1. This would be the madness of a communist utopia which has never worked, nor ever will work.
  - 2. Man was commanded to subdue the earth (**GEN 1:26**) which requires effort and pain which we naturally resist.
  - 3. God has ordained and blessed diligence which produces distinctions of success. **ECC 9:10; PRO 12:24; ROM 12:11.**
  - 4. We must live in a world of distinguishing abilities, drives, achievements, risks and rewards, divine favors, etc. while not forgetting our Maker. **1CO 4:6-7; 1TI 6:17-19.**
  - 5. It is the policy of wicked manipulators to stir up class envy to foment strife and division in order to destabilize a society for political gain. Beware of any theory that advances equality of outcome rather than equality of opportunity. **ECC 4:4.**

### III. Envy is a work of the flesh which forbids inheritance of Christ's kingdom. **GAL 5:21.**

- A. It is a corrupt part of the old man which is to be mortified by grace and conversion.

**GAL 5:26; TIT 3:3.**

- B. Envy will always be a part of our Christian struggle until death or the resurrection but need not be our premature destruction.
1. There is a difference between a heart that struggles against envy and the heart that is "...full of envy..." (**ROM 1:29**).
  2. If envy *rules* unrepented of in the heart it will not be unseen forever. **1TI 5:24-25**.
  3. Sooner or later, the envious heart will be revealed. **LUK 6:45**.
  4. God judges the unseen envy that the brethren may not see (**JER 11:20**) but when seen openly, the church must separate from such.
  5. Quench not the Spirit of God which convicts you of envy. **1TH 5:19**.

IV. Envy

- A. will not abide alone. **PHIL 1:15; JAM 3:16**.
- B. will generate outrageous conclusions. **GEN 30:1**.
- C. blind you to the reception of God's words. **1PE 2:1-2**.
- D. core you out. **PRO 14:30 c/w PSA 112:1-10**.
1. "My own misery I can endure, but not another man's happiness." (Unknown)
  2. "There were two persons, one covetous and the other envious, to whom a certain person promised to grant whatever they should ask; but double to him who should ask last. The covetous man would not ask first, because he wished to get the double portion, and the envious man would not make the first request because he could not bear the thoughts of thus benefiting his neighbor. However, at last he requested that one of his eyes should be taken out, in order that his neighbor might lose both." (likely fable, as related in Adam Clarke's Commentary)
- E. can drive you to violence. **PRO 27:4**.
1. "One may avoid a sudden heat, as David escaped Saul's javelin, but when it grows, as Saul's did, to a settled envy, there is no standing before it; it will pursue; it will overtake. He that grieves at the good of another will be still contriving to do him hurt, and will keep his anger for ever." (Matthew Henry on **PRO 27:4**)
  2. "At the root of Cain's bitterness was the cancer of envy, before which no man can stand (**PRO 27:4**). Note that nothing more is needed to invoke the wrath of the ungodly than to be the object of God's favor. The very fact that Abel simply did what was right, and God having accepted it, was sufficient to expose Cain for what he truly was. *Those who work righteousness are envied of their neighbor* (**ECC 4:4**). *The upright are an abomination to the wicked* (**PRO 29:27**), and are *hated by the bloodthirsty* (**PRO 29:10**). The just, simply by fearing God, are a condemnation to the ungodly (**MAT 12:41; HEB 11:7**). Envy, left unchecked, as with Cain, will surely motivate the unjust to dispose of the just, thus eliminating the stigma. It moved the patriarchs against Joseph (**ACT 7:9**) Korah and company against Moses (**PSA 106:16**), the chief priests and elders against Christ (**MAT 27:18**); and the Jews against the apostles (**ACT 17:5**). Cain, unwilling to do well and acknowledge that God was just in His law and blessing and that Abel was just in his actions, chose to eliminate the competition (**GEN 4:8**)." (PWB, *The Epistle of Jude, appendix*, 12-6-92, edited)

V. Beware the evil eye of envy that sees the advantage of another and cannot abide by it. **MAT 6:23; 20:15**.

- A. Saul's envy was noted by, "...And Saul eyed David..." (**1SAM 18:8-9**).
- B. "Envy is the devil's eye, as hypocrisy is the devil's cloven foot." (Unknown)

- C. Beware of the “unfair” claim when it comes to God’s expectations or favor. **JOH 21:20-22.**
- D. Envy of the valid advantage of another (the favor of God, success by merit, inheritance, etc.) is one thing. But it is especially vain to be envious at the prosperity of the wicked. **PSA 37:1.**
  - 1. Jeremiah struggled with this while recognizing that such “prospered” by the will of God. **JER 12:1-2.**
  - 2. David did likewise but he came to realize that his lot was actually better. **PSA 73:1-3, 16-24.**
  - 3. What a difference an eternal perspective makes!

VI. Consider the gainsaying of Core/Korah. **JUDE 1:11.**

- A. This was expressly a case of envying Moses and Aaron. **PSA 106:16 c/w NUM 16:1-3, 8-10.**
- B. This envy manifested in *rebellion* (rising up against legitimate authority).
  - 1. Any striving for office must be done lawfully. **2TI 2:5.**
  - 2. This is sin like witchcraft (which is another unlawful grasp for power). **1SAM 15:23.**
- C. Moses’s hands and conscience were clean; he was not self-willed, nor a defrauder. **NUM 16:15, 28.**
- D. The rebels were destroyed by God (**vs. 31-35**) and the survivors blamed Moses and Aaron, which provoked God to destroy them all. **vs. 41-50.**
  - 1. Moses’s love for the people went on display even after their rebellion.
  - 2. Hirelings do not care for the sheep. **JOH 10:12-13.**
- E. Well did James write: “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work” (**JAM 3:16**).
  - 1. The word here translated “confusion” is translated as *tumults* in **2CO 6:5; 12:20** and as *commotions* in **LUK 21:9.**
  - 2. Do not underestimate the disrupting damage envy can work on an otherwise stable society. Common sense goes out the window.
- F. Having preeminence is one thing; loving it for power and attention is another. **3JO 1:9-10.**
- G. James also cautioned about the down-side of high office. **JAM 3:1.**
- H. “A French officer, General Cherin, was once conducting a detachment through a deep and dangerous glen. Seeing that his men flagged, he encouraged them to bear the fatigues of the march patiently. A soldier near him muttered, ‘It is all very well for you to talk of patience---you who are mounted on a fine horse; but for us poor wretches it is a different matter.’ The quick ear of the General heard the words. He felt that it was unjust that his men should think that he would not willingly share all their dangers. He reined in his horse at once, and, dismounting, said to the murmuring soldier, ‘Here, take my place awhile.’ Scarcely had the latter mounted, his face covered with confusion, when a shot from the adjacent heights struck the poor fellow, and he fell badly wounded. The General turned to his troop and said, as some were told to carry off their comrade: ‘You see, my men, that the most elevated place is not the least dangerous.’”  
(Elon Foster, *6000 Windows For Sermons*, p. 300, #8398)
- I. The path to greatness in Christ’s kingdom is service, not to be served. **MAT 20:20-28 c/w ROM 12:10, 16.**

VII. It is the nature of man to usually *seek his own*. **PHIL 2:19-21.**

- A. Paul’s instruction concerning marital union shows the importance of deeming another as

oneself so that the benefit of the other is also beneficial to oneself. **EPH 5:28-31.**

- B. Envy is contrary to the most important virtue: charity (**1CO 13:4-5**). Mind the “nots” in these verses which are oft associated with envy.
- C. Mind that Paul’s chapter on the superiority of charity to all gifts comes on the heels of a warning against envy in the church about God’s gifts. **1CO 12:14-18, 28.**
- D. Marriage, family, church and even society at large imperil themselves by disregarding this fundamental rule of charity.

VIII. Consider some noble people in Scripture who did not let envy ruin them:

- A. Moses. **NUM 11:27-29.**
- B. Jonathan. **1SAM 23:17.**
- C. John the Baptist. **JOH 3:25-30.**
- D. Peter. **2PE 3:15.**
- E. Paul. **PHIL 1:15-18.**

IX. Consider some triggers of envy, and make not provision for it, per **ROM 13:14.**

- A. Laziness. This is how “...envy slayeth the silly one” (**JOB 5:2 c/w PRO 21:25**). Slothful people would rather envy the diligent, rob the diligent, or hire someone to plunder the diligent under color of law.
- B. Perceived injustice.
  - 1. Injustice may be genuine and countered by godly means.
  - 2. Injustice may be actually a rejection of God’s sovereignty or favor. **JOH 21:22.**
  - 3. Injustice may be concocted in disregard of other factors that distinguish men: ill-breeding, lack of education, lack of self-discipline, etc.
- C. Pride. One cannot bear the thought of being less or having less than another. **1JO 2:16.**
- D. Conviction by a better example. **JOH 11:47 c/w MAT 27:18.**
- E. Rejection by God because of disobedience. **GEN 4:5.**
- F. Regret or bitterness over one’s own bad decisions. **1SAM 15:28; 18:8-16.**
- G. Lack of contentment.
  - 1. This is a major source of envy, especially in the area of possessions, since the lust for wealth is insatiable. **ECC 5:10; PSA 62:10.**
  - 2. Hence, we are warned against covetousness when commanded to be content. **HEB 13:5.**
  - 3. Contentment is an achievable learned estate. **PHIL 4:11-12.**
  - 4. Distinguish between a desire to improve one’s station in life by godly means and a lack of contentment that drives one to covetousness and envy.

X. “We may cure envy in ourselves, either by considering how useless or how ill these things were for which we envy our neighbor, or else how we possess as much or as good things. If I envy his greatness, I consider that he wants my quiet; as also I consider that he possibly envies me as much as I do him; and that when I begun to examine exactly his perfections, and to balance them with my own, I found myself as happy as he was. And though many envy others, yet very few would change their condition even with those whom they envy, all being considered.”  
(Elon Foster, *6000 Windows For Sermons*, p. 300, #8391)