

What's Wrong with Envy?

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Introduction.

- A. For most Christians, there's a wide range of sins that don't trouble us. Few, if any, of us really have to grit our teeth when we drive by a bank to keep from leaping out of the car and robbing it. However, just about all of us have hated somebody else, even if just a little bit, because he was or had something we wanted.
- B. That resentment of the blessings of others is at the heart of two closely related sins: jealousy and envy. Jealousy is when we desire those blessings for ourselves; envy is when we want to have them and want the other guy not to have them. Jealousy is content with getting a well paying job too, but envy isn't satisfied until we have the corner office and the other guy is in the unemployment line. Neither jealousy nor envy is particularly attractive, but envy, if anything, is the more loathsome of the two and the bigger problem.
- C. Even though envy is such an ugly sin, it's still one we can struggle with. It's easy for us to come to services three times a week for years, yet for every one of them, also resent a brother or sister for some imagined superiority. We can be as secretive about our hatred as possible, but it will still cause us to be lost just as surely as a career of bank robbery. We need to be watchful for envy in ourselves and quick to stomp it out when it appears. Let's look at the story of David and Saul this morning to answer, "What's wrong with envy?"

I. Immediate Effects.

- A. First of all, and perhaps most basically, what's wrong with envy is that **IT HATES EXCELLENCE**. We see this plainly in the heart of Saul in 1 Samuel 18:7-8. In this context, David has just come back from leading Saul's troops in battle against the Philistines, with great success. As he comes back to Saul's palace, the women start singing about how David has killed even more Philistines than Saul. Saul had the choice to take this in one of two ways. First, he could have rejoiced, because this servant of his kingdom was so successful and doing such a good job of fighting Saul's enemies. Second, he could get mad because David was accumulating more glory than Saul himself. Obviously, that's the course Saul took. He began to hate David, not because David had done anything to him, or done anything wrong to anybody, but just because David was good at what he did.
- B. This attitude is so obviously reprehensible in Saul, but we can fall into the same trap without even realizing it. There's a part of each one of us that wants to be at the top of the heap, and it's always difficult to see somebody else at the top of the heap instead of us. Along those lines, I can't help but remember a friend I had in high school. His name was Zac, and he was just one of those cool people. He had a voice that everybody said reminded them of Barry White, he was the best debater on the debate team, and he always had girls falling all over him. He simply had that knack for making his whole life seem funny and fascinating and, well, enviable. He was my friend, but when I looked at him from the perspective of not being the best debater on the squad, and not being able to get a date to save my life, it was hard to deal with sometimes.
- C. Sooner or later, every one of us is going to run into a Zac, and when we do, we have to watch ourselves. The Bible tells us that we are supposed to rejoice with those who rejoice, that we are supposed to admire what is excellent. Envy, though, leads us to hate what is admirable. We see someone who is gifted and doing great things with his gifts, but we want to oppose him and tear him down rather than congratulating him. Nothing so destructive can possibly be from God. Instead, through envy, we imitate the heart of Satan.
- D. The second problem with envy is that **IT PROMOTES INSECURITY**. Look at what happened to Saul in 1 Samuel 18:14-15. David was doing such a great job that it made Saul fear for his kingdom. If David hadn't been around, Saul would have been OK, but even though David hadn't threatened Saul, his excellence made Saul uneasy on his throne. Envy will have the same effect on us. The whole process of comparing ourselves to somebody else comes from insecurity, but as we become envious, it only makes the insecurity worse. Back in the day, I didn't spend my time thinking about how I was smarter than Zac was, or was a better writer, or had a better home life. No. It was always the things in which he was better than I was that I zeroed in on, which made me more insecure about myself, which, at the very least, made all of my girl problems a self-fulfilling prophecy. That's the insidious thing about envy. Every last one of us has use and value, but when we envy somebody else, it blinds us to our own gifts, which makes the insecurity and the envying worse.
- E. Third, **ENVY LEADS TO SIN**. There are many instances in which Saul's envy of David made him sin against him, but we see one of the first in 1 Samuel 18:17, 19. Just like David later did to Uriah the Hittite, Saul sends David into battle in the hope that the Philistines would kill him. When David messed up the plan by coming back alive, Saul went back on his word to give David his daughter in marriage. In a nutshell, all of Saul's conduct toward David became evil in intention and action, all because of the envy he nurtured in his heart.
- F. Just as it was in Saul at first, envy in us starts out as a sneaky sin, but as time progresses, it generates all kinds of other sins that become less sneaky and more overt. In a day and age where violence is frowned on, we don't usually try to have those we envy killed, but we are certainly quite fond of character assassination. If

envy goes unchecked within us, it will inevitably lead to a campaign of gossip and backbiting, in which we have three objects. At a minimum, we hope to make him look bad. Better still, we hope to interfere with his success so that we don't see anything to envy anymore. Most insidiously, though, when we snipe at somebody else like that, we're trying to convince ourselves, which, naturally, never works. Gossip is only the beginning of the list of the sins that envy generates, too. It can also lead to anything from lying to out-and-out murder. Once Satan's led us to envy, he's set the hook, and he can yank us around wherever he wants us to go.

II. Distant Effects.

- A. As the destructive work of envy continues within us, it creates a number of other effects that don't show up at first. First among these is that **IT ALIENATES FRIENDS**. This happens to Saul in 1 Samuel 20:32-34. Jonathan is Saul's son, the heir to his throne and a righteous man about whom Scripture has nothing bad to say. Jonathan sees David's accomplishments just like Saul does, but instead of hating David for his excellence, he loves him for it instead. Because he loves his father too, Jonathan refuses to believe that Saul is working against David for long after David sees it. However, once Jonathan realizes what's going on, he's appalled. Saul is still his king, but the text implies that Jonathan has lost all respect for his father from that time forward.
- B. Likewise, if we continue in our envy-driven whisper campaign for long enough, sooner or later, the righteous people around us will figure out what's going on. They'll start comparing what they see of the one we envy with what we say, and they'll realize that the two stories don't line up. Nobody loves an envious man, and nobody loves a backbiter, and once our friends realize what we are, they'll be ashamed of us too.
- C. Finally, though, the last problem of envy is that **IT GENERATES FAILURE**. Look at the conclusion of the dealings between Saul and David described in 1 Samuel 21:10. Saul is locked in a death struggle with the Philistines. He needs all the help he can get, and David is the best war leader in all of Israel. So what does Saul do? He drives David into the arms of the Philistines, to eventually become the servant of a Philistine king. In the very next battle with the Philistines, without David, Saul and three of his sons are slain. Saul's envy of David doesn't just weaken him and make him look bad. It leads to his destruction too.
- D. On a subtler, personal level, the same is true for us. If we base our self-esteem on comparing ourselves to others, we are always going to be insecure and unhappy. Even if our envy of another leads to his downfall, there's always going to be somebody else whom we fear makes us look bad. Envy never runs out of targets, and if we allow it, we can envy until the end of our lives, ensuring misery now and in the life to come.

Conclusion. Instead of envying, we should turn our lives over to the Lord who can sustain and protect us.