

## Doctrine of Envy

1. The word “envy” is used twenty times in the Authorized Version.
2. The following definitions help to understand the Biblical teaching on envy.
  - ❖ English. Envy is the painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage
  - ❖ Hebrew. The Hebrew word translated “envy” is קִנְיָהּ *qin'ah* (kin-aw'); jealousy or envy: sake, zeal.
  - ❖ Greek. The most common Greek word for envy is φθόνος *phthonos* (fthon'-os); ill-will (as detraction), i.e. jealousy (spite).
3. It is a spiritual truth that the sin of sinners directly tends to their own ruin: *Wrath kills the foolish man*, his own wrath, and therefore he is foolish for indulging it; it is a fire in his bones, in his blood, enough to put him into a fever. Envy is the rottenness of the bones, and so slays the silly one that frets himself with it (Matthew Henry).
  - *Job 5:2 For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one.*
4. Within the context of Proverbs 3:31-35 there are several reasons not to envy those who hurt others.
  - *Proverbs 3:31 Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways. 32 For the froward [perverse] is abomination to the LORD: but his secret is with the righteous. 33 The curse of the LORD is in the house of the wicked: but he blesseth the habitation of the just. 34 Surely he scorneth the scorners: but he giveth grace unto the lowly. 35 The wise shall inherit glory: but shame shall be the promotion [reward] of fools.*

### Eight Reasons Not to Envy the Wicked

- ❖ The ways of the wicked are noticed by and abhorred by the Lord.
- ❖ God will share spiritual secrets or insights with the righteous.
- ❖ God will curse the wicked.
- ❖ God will bless the righteous.
- ❖ God will scorn the scorners.
- ❖ God will give grace to the humble.
- ❖ God will give glory to the wise.
- ❖ God will give shame to fools.

5. A large portion of good health depends on how well emotions are controlled as the dark thoughts of the mind are tempered. A healthy spirit characterized by love and meekness, and accompanied by a friendly, cheerful disposition, will bring vitality of life to the flesh and will contribute to a better quality of physical health. In contrast, a fretful, envious, discontented spirit will bring its own self destructive elements. Such a spirit will consume the flesh, entertain dark thoughts of the soul, and rob the heart of joy. Envy is *the rottenness of the bones*.

- *Proverbs 14:30 A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.*

*Special Note.* Asaph confessed that he was envious of the wicked until he went into the house of the Lord and saw the end of those who will not put away emotional sins of the soul (Psalm 73).

6. The heart of the righteous must not envy the outward success of the wicked.

- *Proverbs 23:17 Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.*

***Special Note.***

It is not hard to look at those living contrary to the will of God and envy their prosperity, especially when the wicked mock Christ and Christians. However, all people will have an end and after that the judgment. Then will the teaching of Christ be realized. Those who live righteously shall be blessed. *Matthew 5:10 Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 Blessed are ye, when men shall revile you, and persecute you, and shall say all manner of evil against you falsely, for my sake. 12 Rejoice, and be exceeding glad: for great is your reward in heaven: for so persecuted they the prophets which were before you.*

7. When the passion of envy is unleashed and without restraint, there is great trouble that will come to the soul. “Wrath (it is true) is cruel, and does many a barbarous thing, and anger is outrageous; but a secret enmity at the person of another, an envy at his prosperity, and a desire of revenge for some injury or affront, are much more mischievous. 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).

- *Proverbs 27:4 Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?*

***Special Note.***

The great evangelist Dwight L. Moody (1837-1899) used to illustrate the deadly effects of envy. “There is a fable of an eagle”, he said, “which could out fly another, and the other didn't like it. The latter saw a sportsman one day, and said to him: ‘I wish you would bring down that eagle.’ The sportsman replied that he would if he only had some feathers to put into the arrow. So the eagle pulled one out of his wing. The arrow was shot, but didn't quite reach the rival eagle; it was flying too high. The envious eagle pulled out more feathers, and kept pulling them out until he lost so many that he couldn't fly, and then the sportsman turned around and killed him. My friend, if you are full of envy, the only man you can hurt is yourself.” The brothers of Joseph would agree (Genesis 37).

8. There is an end to all human affections as we know and understand them.
  - *Ecclesiastes 9:6 Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.*
9. The gospel reign of the Messiah brings an enlargement to His kingdom and peace to those who march under His banner. Old feuds are dissolved in order to victoriously fight a common enemy.
  - *Isaiah 11:13 The envy also of Ephraim shall depart, and the adversaries of Judah shall be cut off: Ephraim shall not envy Judah, and Judah shall not vex Ephraim.*
10. Atheists, scorners, and those who live securely in wickedness, will shortly feel what now they will not believe that *it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.*

***Special Note.***

Those that bear ill-will to God's people have reason to be ashamed of it, so absurd and unreasonable is it; and, sooner or later, they shall be ashamed of it, and the remembrance of it shall fill them with confusion.

Some read it, They shall see and be confounded for the zeal of the people, by the zeal God will show for his people; when they shall be made to know how jealous God is for the honour and welfare of his people, they shall be confounded to think that they might have been part of that people and refused to be.

Their doom therefore is that, since they slighted the happiness of God's friends, the fire of his enemies shall devour them, that is, the fire which is prepared for his enemies and with which they shall be devoured, the fire designed for the devil and his angels.

**Special Note.** Those that are enemies to God's people, and envy them, God looks upon as his enemies, and will deal with them accordingly” (Matthew Henry).

- *Isaiah 26:11 Lord, when thy hand is lifted up, they will not see: but they shall see, and be ashamed for their envy at the people; yea, the fire of thine enemies shall devour them.*

11. The sin of envy leads to other cluster sins such as anger and hatred in the heart reflected in the Edomites who were the enemies of Israel.

- *Ezekiel 35:11 Therefore, as I live, saith the Lord God, I will even do according to thine anger, and according to thine envy which thou hast used out of thy hatred against them; and I will make myself known among them, when I have judged thee.*

**Special Note.** Though the Edomites wanted to take advantage of the loss of the Israelites during the Babylonian Captivity, the Lord vowed to avenge His people. There is a spiritual principle that what is sown is reaped. At all costs Christians must root out the sin of envy lest in the day of divine visitation it be a main cause of judgment.

12. The Lord knows the thoughts of our hearts and the dark lust passions of the soul. When left unchecked, the sin of envy will be the motivating cause of the worse sins, such as delivering Christ to be crucified.

- *Matthew 27:18 For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.*

13. It is possible to be religious without being regenerated. When the heart is not converted then the evil that individuals do becomes all the more horrific because it is done in the name of religion.

- *Mark 15:10 For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy.*

14. The sins of the esteemed are just as dishonorable as the sins of the non-elect. As envy will motivate a person to kill, so envy will motivate a person to disregard human life for personal profit.

- *Acts 7:9 And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt: but God was with him,*

15. To the list of murder and ill treatment of others for personal profit, lying must be added as a result of the heart motivated by envy.

- *Acts 13:45 But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*

16. The sin of envy motivated certain Jews to incite a riot against the servants of the Lord.

- *Acts 17:5 But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.*

17. The heart of the unconverted is described in all of its horror.

- *Romans 1:29 Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers,*

18. Because He is sovereign, God can use even the dark passions of the heart to rebound to His glory so that Christ is preached and souls are saved and blessed.

- *Philippians 1:15 Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will:*

19. Envy is declared to be a by product of pride.

- *1 Timothy 6:4 He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,*

20. Envy is not to characterize the behavior of a Christian but is to stand in stark contrast to the works of the flesh following a conversion experience.

- *Titus 3:3 For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.*

21. At least one verse in the Bible teaches that as there can be anger without sin, so there can be envy, or a yearning after something, without fault.

- *James 4:5 Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?*

***Special Note.***

The spirit of the world teaches men to be churls [rude, ill bred, and stingy]; God teaches them to be bountiful. The spirit of the world teaches us to lay up, or lay out, for ourselves, and according to our own fancies; God teaches us to be willing to communicate to the necessities and to the comfort of others, and so as to do good to all about us, according to our ability. The grace of God is contrary to the spirit of the world, and therefore the friendship of the world is to be avoided, if we pretend to be friends of God yea, the grace of God will correct and cure the spirit that naturally dwells in us; where he giveth grace, he giveth another spirit than that of the world (Matthew Henry).

***Special Note.***

There is no Old Testament passage that is precisely like James notes though it might be considered “a poetical rendering” of Exodus 20:5. *Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them, nor serve them: for I the Lord thy God am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate me.* The general thought occurs in Genesis 6:3-5; Isaiah 63:8-16, etc. Paul has the same idea in Galatians 5:17, 21 and Romans 8:6, 8 (A. T. Robertson).

22. For the concerned Christian, the emotion of envy must be seriously considered in detail when examining the heart to root out sin because envy is grounded in pride. Envy becomes the foundational motive for lying, murder, ill treatment of others for personal profit, and the gaining of a following on a false pretense. May God the Holy Spirit strive successfully in our hearts against the corruption of another passion following the Fall.