

Week 11: Envy & Kindness

“There is but one step from envy to hate.” (Goethe)

Envy

Though Scripture addresses many sins, it describes few as bluntly as it does envy. In Proverbs 14:30, Solomon writes that “...envy is rottenness to the bones” (NKJV).

Envy has the ability to consume one’s character in the same way gangrene consumes one’s body, and I can do this with the speed of an unrelenting cancer.

The Bible is rife with examples of envy and its destructiveness:

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4)

Sarah and Hagar (Genesis 16)

Rachel and Leah (Genesis 30:1)

Joseph’s brothers and Joseph (Genesis 37:11)

Korah and Moses (Numbers 16)

The Jewish leaders and Jesus (Mark 15:10)

The Jewish leaders and Paul (Acts 13:45)

Individuals consumed with envy are often driven to destroy the object of their envy, and these Biblical examples demonstrate that.

Envy is not content to simmer in one’s heart. It does more than Compel one to act destructively, it propels one toward destructive action. The effects of envy are often more than simply disastrous, they are swiftly disastrous.

Because of this, God declares in no uncertain terms that those who are envious will not inherit the kingdom of God (Galatians 5:21).

The Problems With Envy

Here are four reasons why God detests envy:

Envy is carnal. On more than one occasion, Scripture describes envy as appealing to temporal and base desires:

“For you are still carnal. For where there are envy, strife, and divisions among you, are you not carnal and behaving like mere men?” (1 Corinthians 3:3, NKJV)

“Now the works of the flesh are evident, which are...envy...” (Galatians 5:19,21, NKJV)

The problem with this?

It's exactly the opposite of what Christians are commanded to focus on:

"Therefore if you have been raised up with Christ, keep seeking the things above, where Christ is, seated at the right hand of God. Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth ." (Colossians 3:1-2, NASB)

Envy is contrary to love. 1 Corinthians 13:4 clearly states that love "does not envy" (NKJV).

We can love, or we can envy, but we cannot do both.
If our aim is to be godly, the choice is obvious:

"God is love and the one who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in Him." (1 John 4:16, NASB)

Envy produces confusion and all kinds of evil. Envy is a gateway sin, leading to a multitude of other evils:

"For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there." (James 3:16, NKJV)

Envy leads one to destroy the object of his envy. This was mentioned at the start of the lesson. Envy is not satisfied to merely feel ill toward another, it thrives on destructive action against another.

To drive this point home, we need only remember the heinous death that our Savior suffered.

Even Pilate could see through the Jews' murderous motives:

"For he [Pilate] knew that because of envy they [the Jews] had handed Him over." (Matthew 27: 18, NASB)

The Heart Of The Matter

At the end of the day, the most important thing in life is relationship.

Every command of God revolves around relationship, either to Him or to others. Every single one.

"'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the great and foremost commandment. The second is like it, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments depend the whole Law and the Prophets." (Matthew 22:37-40, NASB)

Thus, anything that promotes God-approved relationship is good and right, and anything that destroys God-approved relationship is sin.

Envy is the latter.

Kindness

If envy rots a person to the core, kindness breathes new life into dead men's bones. Mark Twain once said, "Kindness is the language which the deaf can hear and the blind can see."

It transcends language, background, intelligence level, and religious bent. It has the power to lift up the downtrodden and the power to humble the arrogant.

While envy burns bridges, kindness builds them.

The Virtues of Kindness

Here are five reasons why true kindness is as virtuous as envy is vicious:

True kindness is shown to all men. "But love your enemies, and do good, and lend, expecting nothing in return; and your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High; for He Himself is kind to ungrateful and evil men. " (Luke 6:35, NASB)

The kindness of God is the standard for our kindness.

God chooses to pour out His kindness on all men, whether they are grateful for it or not.

True kindness is shown, even when it's not deserved. An interesting phrase is used in Psalm 119:76. While the NASB simply translates it "lovingkindness," the NKJV renders the phrase as "merciful kindness."

This indicates that God not only doles out His kindness when it is justly called for but even when it is not. God does not reserve His kindness only for those who actually deserve it, but He showers it down on those who certainly do not deserve it.

God willingly demonstrates kindness even in circumstances where it can only be described as merciful kindness.

True kindness shows no partiality.

True kindness is a characteristic of godly love. Just as surely as envy is not a characteristic of godly love, kindness is.

According to 1 Corinthians 13:4, love is kind. The two qualities go hand-in-hand.

True kindness acts, even when it makes one vulnerable. “But God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us...For if while we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His son...” (Romans 5:8,10, NASB)

God showed us the kindness of His Son, not while we were His friends, but while we were His enemies.

This opened God up to the possibility of rejection. By showing us kindness while we were in a hostile stance against Him, God ran the risk of having His kindness thrown back in His face.

And, in fact, most people do throw it back in His face (consider Matthew 7:13-14).

Yet, knowing this would be the case, God still showed us His kindness.

True kindness is part of the fruit of the Spirit. “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control...” (Galatians 5:22-23, NASB)

True kindness is more than just something God does, it is who He is.

The Command

Kindness is not merely a good idea. It is commanded by God to be found in our character:

“Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving each other, just as God in Christ also has forgiven you.” (Ephesians 4:32, NASB)

“Add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge, to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness, to godliness brotherly kindness, to brotherly kindness love.” (2 Peter 1:5-7, NKJV)

“What is desired in a man is kindness...” (Proverbs 19:22, NKJV)

Questions for Thought and Discussion

1. Define envy, jealousy, and covetousness. How are these three concepts related? How are they different?
2. Scripture indicates that envy is carnal. Give some examples of carnal desires that are often associated with envy. In other words, when a person is full of envy, what kinds of things are they often envious of?
3. James 3:16 indicates that all kinds of evil flow from and are associated with envy. Generate a list of evils that might keep company with envy.
4. What are some practical steps that we can take to overcome envy?
5. Give some examples of kindness being shown in the Bible.
6. Does kindness necessitate that we like the person we are showing kindness to?
7. Is there ever a time when kindness is inappropriate?