

Love Does Not Envy By Wendy Wood



Love does not envy. The original word is *zelos*. It is a feeling of discontent or covetousness with regard to another's advantages, successes, or possessions. Wayne Mack says "envy consists of a disposition of dissatisfaction or dislike over the fact or thought that someone seems to be ahead of us, or above us, or superior to us in honor, position, respect, success, possessions or effectiveness".⁷ At the heart of envy is self glory. Envy wants the attention and pleasure that someone else is experiencing for itself. When we are envious of another person, we are unhappy that something good is happening to them, and we want it for ourselves. Envy says to God, "You should have given _____ to me!" It is an accusation against God's goodness and wisdom in how He gives blessings to people.

Scripture paints envy as a significant sin.⁸

⁷ Maximum Impact by Wayne Mack

⁸ Maximum Impact by Wayne A Mack (I have taken this list from examples used in this book.)

Satan was envious of God's authority and power and tempted Eve to follow him rather than God. (Genesis 3)

Cain was envious of Abel being accepted by God and it led to murder. (Genesis 4)

Joseph's brothers were envious of the attention he received from his father as the favorite son and they sold him into slavery. (Genesis 37)

Saul was envious of David because David proved himself a mighty warrior and received praise from the people. (1 Samuel 18)

The chief priests and elders were envious of Jesus' popularity and had Him arrested. Even Pilate knew the arrest was a result of envy. (Matthew 27)

Throughout Scripture there are several places that list sins. These lists tend to include serious sins, and among them is envy.

Mark 7:21-23 "For from within, out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality, envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All these evil things come from within, and they defile a person."

This is significant because it shows envy begins in the heart (as all sin does). Envy is from a heart that seeks its own good and its own pleasures over and above the good of others.

Romans 1:28-31 "And since they did not see fit to acknowledge God, God gave them up to a debased mind to do what ought not to be done. They were filled with all manner of unrighteousness, evil, covetousness, malice. They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness. They are gossips, slanderers, haters of God, insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless"

Envy does not acknowledge God's ultimate freedom to make decisions. He gives and He takes away out of His nature that is wise, loving, powerful, kind, and good. Envy assumes that we know more and would make better decisions than God as to who has talents, possessions, successes, and positions.

Galatians 5:19-21 "Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions,

divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.”

Envy is a work of the flesh. Envy is the deceitful desire of the flesh to want more than God is giving. It is the desire to have the recognition, position, success, or praise that someone else is receiving. Rather than loving the other person and celebrating with them (or rejoicing with those who rejoice), an envious person wishes the other person didn't have those blessings. Genuine love is glad for others who are experiencing happiness and success. Genuine love celebrates other people and gives thanks to God for blessing others.

Consider these times when envy is a temptation.

A friend calls you to share the exciting news that her son is receiving an award at school (and your son is not).

The person who works next to you receives a promotion and you have been at the company longer than he/she has.

You start scrolling through social media to see a family from church on ANOTHER vacation when you haven't taken one for a couple of years.

A friend's husband receives a reward at work and your friend spends 30 minutes telling you how awesome this award is and how proud she is of her husband.

Your friend goes on and on about how considerate and loving his/her spouse is and you've been struggling with your spouse for months.

A friend invites you over to show you the newly redecorated rooms in her house and your husband has been refusing to spend money on your house for years.

When others succeed or have an advantage or receive an unexpected gift, we tend to think “what about me?” We quickly size up the situation and feel like we haven't gotten what we deserve so someone else shouldn't get it either. We reveal the pride in our hearts by the self-focus of our response. Our eyes (and desires) are on ME. Rather than trusting in God's goodness and wisdom in how He allocates position and possessions, we accuse God of being unfair and unkind to us. Envy robs us of loving God and others.

The opposite of envy is contentment. Contentment is *autarkeia in the Greek and means* “a perfect condition of life in which no aid or support is needed, sufficiencies of all the necessities of life”. First Timothy 6:6 says, “But godliness with contentment is great gain”. The same word, *autarkeia*, is translated as *sufficiency* in 2 Corinthians 9:8. “And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that having all sufficiency in all things at all times, you may abound in every good work.”

God’s grace is what brings contentment because it is sufficient. It is more than enough. It abounds! God’s grace in Christ is the only place where we can find contentment. Through Christ we are forgiven and restored to a relationship with God. We are eternally secure in Christ’s righteousness and holiness credited to us. There is absolutely nothing else we need. When our contentment is in Jesus - not our circumstances, possessions, advancements, successes, or approval ratings - we will find rest from the unrest of envy. When we rest in Christ, we are not dependent on people or things to make us happy.

Jerry Bridges says, “The choice to accept it [God’s grace is sufficient] and experience contentment is mine. And the choice is yours in your particular circumstances. This is the secret of contentment [and I would say, freedom from envy and jealousy]: to learn and accept that we live daily by God’s unmerited favor given through Christ, and that we can respond to any and every situation by his divine enablement through the Holy Spirit.”⁹

Contentment comes when we recognize and submit to the fact that God is the giver of all gifts. God gives “severe mercies” at times which are gifts that are challenging and are truly hardships, but He uses them to draw us to Himself and cause us to grow in humility and dependence on Him. God gives mercies that are easy to accept that we joyfully receive because they feel good. Contentment is based on feelings, however. Contentment trusts that in God’s wisdom, love and power, He has given us what is best for us. First Corinthians 4:7 asks, “What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?” Every gift, whether difficult or easy to receive, is from God. Who are you to judge the gifts God gives to you or others?

Christ has already satisfied the wrath of God for your sins. Christ has lived the perfect holy and righteous life that is now credited to all who trust in Him as Lord and Savior. Christ has defeated death and sin so that neither controls you or enslaves you. Christ

⁹ Jerry Bridges, *The Practice of Godliness*.

has ascended and is your Advocate in heaven presenting you as holy and blameless before God the Father. Take some time to meditate on these truths. There is nothing, absolutely nothing, else that you need. Christ is sufficient! His grace abounds!

When you are tempted to be envious, stop and preach the gospel to yourself. Stop and meditate on the seriousness of envy and the accusation against God that He is not enough for you.

Jonathan Edwards has these challenging words. “The spirit of envy is very contrary to the spirit of heaven, where all rejoice in the happiness of others; and it is the very spirit of hell itself - which is the most hateful spirit - and one that feeds itself on the ruin of the prosperity and happiness of others, on which account some have compared envious people to caterpillars, which delight in devouring the most flourishing trees and plants....It is like a powerful eating cancer, preying on the vitals, offensive and full of corruption. It is the most foolish kind of self injury; for the envious make themselves trouble most needlessly, being uncomfortable only because of the prosperity of others when that prosperity does not injure them... But they are unwilling to enjoy what they have because others are or may enjoy what they are enjoying.”¹⁰

Application:

1. Which statements or concepts stand out the most to you about envy?
2. Think about how you respond when others receive benefits in status, possessions, respect, admiration, or successes. Rate yourself on a scale of 1 - 10, (1 being “I always rejoice with others” and 10 being “I'm upset and angry that I didn't get the benefit). Why did you rate yourself this way?
3. Look up the following verses. What do you learn about envy and contentment?

James 3:14-16

Proverbs 27:4

Mark 7:21-23

Proverbs 4:11-12

1 Timothy 6:6

2 Corinthians 9:8

¹⁰ Charity and Its Fruits by Jonathan Edwards.

4. What situations do you tend to be envious about? Does it relate to work, spouse, children, possessions, adventures, reputation, successes? Try to be specific about what areas you are tempted to envy.
5. Which specific people do you struggle to envy the most?
6. Take some time to repent of your envy.
7. How could you “rejoice with those who rejoice” (Romans 12:15) when those situations or people come up? Be specific about what you need to think (renew your mind) and do (Christlike words and actions to put on).