

**ENVY
IS
SINFUL**

By
Buddy J. Duncan

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Introduction

The topic of this writing will be “envy”. If you were to ask me how I feel about envy I would probably reply “I am reminded of a little joke I heard several years ago”. It went something like this; “A little boy went to church one Sunday without his parents; when he got home his mother asked him what the preacher talked about. The little boy answered, ‘Sin’. What did he say about sin” his mother asked. The little boy replied; “He was again it”. This is how I feel about “envy”; I am against it. The reason I am against “envy” is because God is against it and we are commanded to not have envy: (Proverbs 3:31) *“Envy thou not the oppressor, and choose none of his ways.”* In this chapter the children of God are given some fresh ideas and some lessons. Verse thirty one gives them the instruction to “envy not the oppressor”. They had been oppressed by those who gained their wealth and riches by oppressing the poor and it was done so with violence. They were warned not to “envy” the oppressor’s wealth and prosperity. All too often the poor envy the wealthy and wish to be in his place; this is forbidden. It is all too easy to want to possess his affluence and his apparent happiness with envious eyes. But don’t be fooled he is far from being a happy man and his end will be bad: (Psalms 37:1-2) *“Fret not thyself because of evildoers, neither be thou envious against the workers of iniquity.² For they shall soon be cut down like the grass, and wither as the green herb.”* This is not the end that a Christian is looking for!

The apostle Paul also warned Christians not to be envious: (Romans 13:13) *“Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.”* One of the ideas that are presented in this chapter is to love all men; we will have to admit if we are envious of someone we have no love for that person. Let us notice the first commandment of this passage; “let us walk honestly”. If we keep this thought in context with the rest of the verse we find that if we have “envy” we are not walking “honestly”. Paul gives a list of some ugly sins and included in this list is “envy”.

If we were to examine our self most of us would have to say; “envy is one thing I have problems in avoiding”. Have you never seen a bright shining, new convertible and been envious? Ladies have you never seen another woman wearing a beautiful new dress made in the latest style and fashion and been a little bit envious? It is for this very reason that I think that this is a subject that needs to be expounded upon.

What Causes Envy?

There are many causes of “envy”; in his epistle to Timothy Paul wrote of some of the causes of “envy”: (1 Timothy 6:4) *“He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings,”* In this sixth chapter Paul lays down some rules whereby false teachers could be identified and he exhorts Timothy to avoid sin. In the above passage he gives us causes of “envy, strife, railings” and “evil surmisings”. It appears as though pride may be the cause of all of these sins. One who is “proud” is all puffed up with conceit of himself and his ideas. He is unaware that the gospel of grace is of a humbling nature. The doctrines of men are prone to fill the mind with pride and vanity. Pride often results in envy. Teachers and preachers must be on constant guard; especially when they hear other teachers or preachers. We must be very careful when we hear others whom we may judge to be better teachers or preachers than we are not to become envious of them. The proper attitude should be a feeling of gratitude that God has so blessed them with their talent. Envy and strife have been the cause of many divisions within the Lord’s church.

Another cause of envy is when we see the good works of another; this is nothing new: (Ecclesiastes 4:4) *“Again, I considered all travail, and every right work, that for this a man is envied of his neighbour. This is also vanity and vexation of spirit.”* Have you ever witnessed the good work or good deed of another and thought to yourself; “I could have done that better or I would have done more”. If you have ever had such a thought you

are guilty of having “envy” within your heart and mind. When Solomon considered all the “travail” [hard work] that some men performed to do good and “right work” what did he see? He saw that this man “is envied by his neighbor”. I believe we could easily apply another word; I’m thinking of the word jealousy. The one with envy in his heart is sure to find some fault with what was done. Instead of being thankful for the good deed done he is filled with envy and jealousy. Brethren we always have those among us who are in need; their need may be physical or spiritual in nature and opportunity is all around us to do a good work or deed, there is something for everyone to do; there is no just cause for envy, just go and do likewise. Once we recognize the outcome of envy can we not also recognize that it is sinful?

Envy is a work of the flesh: (Galatians 5:16-17) *“This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh. ¹⁷For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh: and these are contrary the one to the other: so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.”* After warning not to “fulfill the lust of the flesh Paul gives a lengthy list of the “lust of the flesh” and our word “envy” is included in that list: (Galatians 5:21) *“Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.”* We should not consider it strange that the word “envyings” in the same verse as “murders, drunkenness and revellings” because in the eyes of God one sin is just as bad as another. Clarke defines the word “envy” of this verse with these words: “A passion of the most base and the least curable of all that disgrace or degrade the fallen soul.” Paul also warned the Romans about “envy”: (Romans 13:13) *“Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.”*

The inspired writer James also wrote of the dangers of “envy”: (James 4:5) *“Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?”* James asks them what they thought; “do you think that the scripture saith in vain”? He is asking them if they thought the scripture was empty and void of any meaning; or do you think that the

scripture really don't mean what they say? When the scripture speaks it has a good reason, we should take every word and commandment of the scripture seriously. The phrase "lusteth to envy" means to strongly tend to envy. The idea is to have a strong inclination to look upon with dissatisfaction the happiness and prosperity of others; furthermore, there is a desire to make what they own ours. This desire may lead to robbery or fraud to possess what another has. If we are troubled that others are more prosperous than we are we are guilty of the sin of "envy" We need to develop the spirit of Christ and forsake the spirit of "envy" which is a work of the flesh.

According to Job "envy" can kill you: (Job 5:2) *"For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one."* Anyone who is silly and void of understanding and is easily drawn into sin and in their hearts are envious of another's prosperity is a foolish and silly man and is certain to bring destruction upon himself. I'm sure that no one wants to self-destruct, therefore, by all means avoid "envy".

The words of Proverbs agree with the words of Job: (Proverbs 14:30) *"A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones."* A man that has "envy" for the happiness and prosperity of others is a person who wastes his own flesh. The Psalmist plainly tells of what will happen to those who do not have "a sound heart": (Psalms 112:10) *"The wicked shall see it, and be grieved; he shall gnash with his teeth, and melt away: the desire of the wicked shall perish."* This is the end of those who have "envy" of another because it is "the rottenness of the bones". "Envy" is a work of the flesh and is very harmful to anyone who is so inclined.

"Envy" will tell others exactly what kind of a person you are; Paul says to have 'envy' is to be "carnally minded" (1 Corinthians 3:1-3) *"And I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. ²I have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able. ³For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?"* Think about

this; even though Paul as an apostle was a spiritual man himself, he had spiritual gifts and he was capable of speaking on the behalf of Jesus was unable to speak to them. It was not the case that they were alien sinners because as Paul says they were “babes in Christ; their situation was that they were carnally minded. They were carnally minded even after having been fed the “milk and not meat”. “The Syriac reads ye are in the flesh”: a phrase the apostle elsewhere uses of men in an unregenerate state; but this is not his meaning here, but that carnality still prevailed among them, of which he gives proof and evidence.” [Gill]. Paul then explains why they are still “carnal”: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?” They were guilty of envying the gifts that others possessed; perhaps they could speak in tongues but they envied a different gift that someone else possessed. They were contentious about who their minister was: (1 Corinthians 3:4) *“For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?”* What was it that caused them to be “carnal”? Looking back to verse three we find that the root cause of their carnality was “envy”. Generally speaking to be “carnal” is to be unconverted, but in the case of these Corinthians they had been converted but they were acting like un-converted men. Can’t we see the danger of “envy”? Can’t we all take a lesson from these Corinthians? Brethren, we need to be aware that the sin of “envy” can affect the Christian and we must rely on the strength of Jesus Christ to help us to overcome all thoughts of envy. Refer to the written word of James: (James 3:14) *“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.”* (James 3:16) *“For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.”* Let us not be confused; to be envious is to be “carnal” that is to act like unconverted men.

Envy Is Inconsistent With The Gospel

I will again refer to the written words of James; (James 3:14) *“But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.”* Please notice that the envy that James makes reference to is “bitter envy”. This is reference to a fierce “envy” against each other;

no doubt this sparked bitter contention. They may have been envious of their external blessing or they might even have been envious of their wisdom and knowledge; regardless of what spurred this “envy” it had grown to the point of becoming “bitter envy”. Such a frame of mind often leads to “strife” and quarrelling with others. When strife and quarreling arise in the church, the body of Christ, we know what often happens. Sides are taken that often ends in driving some from the congregation and may even end in splits. Friends, this is inconsistent with the gospel. Envy and strife interfere with the whole truth of the gospel being told; too much time is being spent in trying to iron out the problem. If you are under the influence of “envy” even when attempting or pretending to defend the truth you must be very careful not to allow “envy” to be your only motive as “envy is inconsistent with the gospel.

Here is a little poem that I believe to be very appropriate:

“Be calm in arguing, for fierceness makes

Error a fault, and truth discourtesy;

Why should I feel another man’s mistakes

More than his sickness or his poverty?

In love I should; but anger is not love,

Nor wisdom neither; therefore g-e-n-t-l-y m-o-v-e.”

{Author unknown}

“Envy” is inconsistent with the gospel because it hinders growth: (1 Peter 2:1-2) *“Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, ²As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby.”* As parents, grandparents or great grandparents we all desire and enjoy seeing our children grow; this is also true with God, he desires and enjoys seeing His adoptive

children grow in knowledge and faith. The word “wherefore” refers to the reasonings of chapter one. The phrase “laying aside” is a lot like pulling of some worn and tattered clothing, never to put them on again; therefore Peter says “lay aside all malice, guile, hypocrisies, envies and evil speaking” and never practice any of these sins again. You may think I am being repetitious but I am going to write it anyway; envy is simply hatred of others on account of some excellencies which they have, or something which they possess which we do not. I find it to be very interesting that Peter adds “evil speaking” immediately after the word “envy”. Wouldn’t you agree that once there is “envy” in your heart that “evil speaking” soon follows? If you are filled with “envy” you will not “desire the sincere milk of the word”. If you don’t desire and accept the “sincere milk of the word you are incapable of growing. Let us pretend that you are envious of the preacher; he stands before the congregation and proclaims nothing but the word of God, he speaks nothing but the truth, allow me to ask this; “How much of his message did you hear, how much of his message did you any good”? Probably little or very little reached your memory bank because you were too busy thinking about how much you dislike that preacher. That being the case the gospel has been greatly hindered. Some may be able to hide their envy from everyone; everyone but the Lord: (Matthew 9:4) *“And Jesus knowing their thoughts said, Wherefore think ye evil in your hearts?”*

Those Filled With Envy Will Be Punished

Often times children will do things that they know they will be punished for; it is no different with women and men of adult age, often times they will do things that they know they will bring punishment to them from God: (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.”* The people had dealt with others with “envy” and indignation; as always the Lord did not prohibit their evil deeds, however, Isaiah warns them that the Lord would lift up His hand and punish them for their evil and sinful deeds. Even though this punishment would be visible many would not recognize it or attribute it to be punishment from the Lord. Rather they would attribute the punishment

of God to only be chance and misfortune: (Psalms 28:5) *“Because they regard not the works of the LORD, nor the operation of his hands, he shall destroy them, and not build them up.”* Can you see anything wrong with not recognizing God’s punishment to be what it actually was? The problem that I see is that there is nothing learned and there is the danger that they will continue to have “envy” in their hearts. Sometimes when the Lord blesses us by doing good to us again we do not recognize it as being from the Lord; we attribute it to chance and our good fortune; or to our own wisdom and skillful ways. What a shame it is that we will not acknowledge the power and glory of God!

Before you misunderstand what I am saying I must tell you I do not think that Isaiah was referring to the Lord’s people; I believe he was writing about the worldly people who were oppressing the children of God. It was the worldly who had “envy” of the happiness and prosperity of the Lord’s people. He is telling them when the Lord lifts up His hand in punishment that the oppressors will “be ashamed for their envy of the people”. Let us admit that we are often times not unlike children; sometimes we have to be punished before we can recognize the error of our ways.

Before we [i.e. Christians] become puffed up thinking that there is no way that we will never be punished I must warn that God will punish all transgressors: (Jeremiah 9:25) *“Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will punish all them which are circumcised with the uncircumcised;”* Jeremiah wrote on behalf of God; “the days come” or the days are coming when the Lord will punish sinners. Who is it that will be punished? According to Jeremiah both the circumcised and the uncircumcised will be punished and Jeremiah warns that these are the words of the Lord by stating “saith the Lord”. Who are the circumcised? The circumcised would be the Jews. Who are the uncircumcised? This would be everyone else; often referred to as the Gentiles. By looking at the next verse we find that this does not refer to a physical circumcision: (Jeremiah 9:26) *“Egypt, and Judah, and Edom, and the children of Ammon, and Moab, and all that are in the utmost corners, that dwell in the wilderness: for all these nations are uncircumcised, and all the house of Israel are uncircumcised in the heart.”* Jeremiah is simply telling them that all transgressors regardless of

whether they are Jew or Gentile will be punished. This is a lesson that we Christians out to take to heart; ALL TRANSGRESSORS WILL BE PUNISHED. Just because you profess to be a Christian does not mean that you shall escape punishment for your sins because just as God punish the circumcised and the uncircumcised the Christian along with the non-Christian will be punished for their transgressions alike. Let us remember that “envy” is a sin that shall bring the punishment of God. Paul backs up the passage of Jeremiah 9:26: (Romans 2:12) *“For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law: and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law;”*

The Lord has warned He will punish the world for their evil: (Isaiah 13:11) *“And I will punish the world for their evil, and the wicked for their iniquity; and I will cause the arrogancy of the proud to cease, and will lay low the haughtiness of the terrible.”* Yes, the day is coming when the Lord will punish the world for the evil they have committed and I remind you again that “envy” is considered to be evil.

We will now turn our attention to those who were personally guilty of harboring envy in their hearts.

Envy Exemplified

CAIN

Very early in the history of mankind “envy” crept in to their hearts: (Genesis 4:1-5) *“And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. ²And she again bare his brother Abel. And Abel was a keeper of sheep, but Cain was a tiller of the ground. ³And in process of time it came to pass, that Cain brought of the fruit of the ground an offering unto the LORD. ⁴And Abel, he also brought of the firstlings of his flock and of the fat thereof. And the LORD had respect unto Abel and to his offering: ⁵But unto Cain and to his offering he had not respect. And Cain was very wroth, and his countenance fell.”* The very first son that God blessed Adam and Eve with became jealous and envied his own flesh and blood, Abel. Abel was a shepherd and Cain was farmer of grain [we would call him a plow boy or a row

cropper]. As time passed they offered a sacrifice to the Lord. Abel offered a first-born of his flock and the fat thereof; and Cain offered some grain from the fruit of the ground. The Lord was pleased with Abel's offering but He had no respect for Cain's offering. You say; "Now wait just a minute; Cain offered the only thing he had to offer". Is that the actual fact, could he not have bought or bartered with Abel for one of his flock? After all Abel's flock would have needed some grain wouldn't they? As we are aware that there was no written law at this time Cain still did not have any excuse for this dreadful mistake as the law of God was handed down by the head of the family [the father] and if Adam told his younger son what God expected surely he would also have informed his firstborn son Cain. The Hebrews writer tells us that Abel offered his sacrifice by faith: (Hebrews 11:4) *"By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts: and by it he being dead yet speaketh."* Since faith comes by hearing [Romans 10:17] we know that Abel had been told what to offer and I firmly believe that Cain was also in possession of this same knowledge. Rather than getting down on his knees and praying for forgiveness Cain became angry and his heart was filled with "envy" resulting in the first murder of God's newly created family. The real danger of "envy" is what it might lead to and with Cain it led to murder.

The Philistines:

The Philistines were envious of Isaac: Genesis 26:12-14) *"Then Isaac sowed in that land, and received in the same year an hundredfold: and the LORD blessed him. ¹³And the man waxed great, and went forward, and grew until he became very great: ¹⁴For he had possession of flocks, and possession of herds, and great store of servants: and the Philistines envied him."* This chapter tells of Isaac going to Gerar because of a famine: (Genesis 26:1) *"And there was a famine in the land, beside the first famine that was in the days of Abraham. And Isaac went unto Abimelech king of the Philistines unto Gerar."* The Lord appeared to him: (Genesis 26:2) *"And the LORD appeared unto him, and said, Go not down into Egypt; dwell in the land which I shall tell thee of:"* Verse seven tells what happened to him because of his wife: (Genesis 26:7) *"And the men of the*

place asked him of his wife; and he said, She is my sister: for he feared to say, She is my wife; lest, said he, the men of the place should kill me for Rebekah; because she was fair to look upon.” The statements of some Bible scholars suggest for verse twelve is rather interesting; they believe that the famine was a year long and if they are correct Isaac was blessed by God with a good harvest; this would explain why the Philistines were so envious of Isaac. Verse twelve ends by saying; “the Lord blessed him”. If you study the life of Isaac you will find that that the Lord prospered Isaac and he was successful and this is the true reason that Isaac’s seed produced “an hundredfold”. What does it mean that Isaac received “an hundredfold”? For every bushel of seed he sowed he harvested one hundred bushels. The rates of increase vary from thirty to one hundred. One hundredfold was very unusual in Palestine. This may be the true reason for the Philistines being envious of Isaac.

There were other reasons for the Philistines to be envious of Isaac as the Lord blessed him with other prosperities. Remember Isaac was a stranger in this area and the natives could see the growth and wealth in his flocks, herds and servants. Then there was his digging of wells, especially in a land where water was precious. The envious Philistines feared that this sojourner just might become a settler and acquire rights of the property where he was so successful. So all the while Isaac was here the “envy” of the Philistines grew.

Laban’s sons:

(Genesis 31:1) *“And he heard the words of Laban’s sons, saying, Jacob hath taken away all that was our father’s; and of that which was our father’s hath he gotten all this glory.”* Even though the word “envy” is not found in this passage the idea of jealousy and “envy” is certainly expressed. This chapter relates how Jacob observed that Laban and his sons envied Jacob’s prosperity. I am not sure how Jacob “heard the words of Laban’s sons; he may have overheard them with his own ears or it could be that a friend of Jacob told him what Laban’s sons said; at any rate he came to have knowledge of their jealousy and “envy”. They said “Jacob hath taken away all that was our father’s”. They did not mean that

Jacob had literally taken everything that their father had because that would have been a lie. We later read of Laban shearing his sheep so they could not have meant everything that Laban possessed: (Genesis 31:19) *“And Laban went to shear his sheep: and Rachel had stolen the images that were her father’s.”* What they really meant was that everything Jacob possessed had at one time been their father’s. Jacob became afraid that they would sooner or later begin to treat him ill fully so he decided it was high time that he get out of there.

Actually what they were saying was true [everything that Jacob owned had at one time belonged to their father] and there is nothing wrong in stating the truth. Their sin was harboring envy in their hearts. Let us also be aware that Jacob did not come into possession of anything illegally; he labored long and for everything including his wives. Jacob had come to own many servants, numerous cattle, sheep, camels and asses. These are the things in which carnal men place their happiness. Following the strife between Jacob and Laban’s sons it does end with a happy note: (Genesis 31:43-48) *“And Laban answered and said unto Jacob, These daughters are my daughters, and these children are my children, and these cattle are my cattle, and all that thou seest is mine: and what can I do this day unto these my daughters, or unto their children which they have born? ⁴⁴Now therefore come thou, let us make a covenant, I and thou; and let it be for a witness between me and thee. ⁴⁵And Jacob took a stone, and set it up for a pillar. ⁴⁶And Jacob said unto his brethren, Gather stones; and they took stones, and made an heap: and they did eat there upon the heap. ⁴⁷And Laban called it Jegarsahadutha: but Jacob called it Galeed. ⁴⁸And Laban said, This heap is a witness between me and thee this day. Therefore was the name of it called Galeed;”* There is a powerful lesson for you and I found in this context; envy can and often does cause trouble and strife among members of a family. Also let us take a lesson from this to depart in a friendly manner.

Joseph’s Brothers:

The “envy” that the brothers of Joseph held in their hearts began because of the love Joseph’s father had for him: (Genesis 37:3-4) *“Now Is-*

rael loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age: and he made him a coat of many colours. ⁴And when his brethren saw that their father loved him more than all his brethren, they hated him, and could not speak peaceably unto him.” This chapter begins the history of a man by the name of Joseph; he was a teenager at the time: (Genesis 37:2) *“These are the generations of Jacob. Joseph, being seventeen years old, was feeding the flock with his brethren; and the lad was with the sons of Bilhah, and with the sons of Zilpah, his father’s wives: and Joseph brought unto his father their evil report.”* The life of Joseph pretty much includes the remaining part of this book. Israel [Joseph’s father] loved Joseph more than all of his children because he was the first-born of Israel’s beloved Rachel. If I were asked to describe Joseph I would probably say; “He was a handsome youth, with great promises for the future”. We might think that Israel should have tried to conceal the great love he had for Joseph; but we know that he did not do that because in an effort to show Joseph how much he loved him Israel had a “coat of many colors” made for him and presented it to Joseph. No doubt Joseph was proud of this coat and wore it everywhere. A few years ago Dolly Parton wrote and sang a popular song about “a coat of many colors that her mother made for her”. It brought much the same results to Dolly that Joseph’s coat brought to him. The Bible states that Israel loved Joseph more than all of his children because Joseph was “the son of his old age”; parents of children in their old age today are prone to love the children of their old age more than their children of younger years. I have read that this was not a jacket that only went down to the waist; rather it reached down to the ankles.

The moral of the story is this; “Sometimes even innocent love can be the cause of “envy”. Brothers and sisters often become envious of each other because of their parent’s love and it may not always the younger child, it may be the oldest child or even a child in the middle of the family. By no means do I believe that we should stop loving our children or one another. The love of God demonstrates that we should love each other.

Joshua

(Numbers 11:28-29) *“And Joshua the son of Nun, the servant of Moses, one of his young men, answered and said, My lord Moses, forbid them. ²⁹And Moses said unto him, Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD’S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!”* Moses asks Joshua in verse 29 “do you envy them for my sake”? It appears to Moses that Joshua believes that they should not be prophesying while Moses was not present and that he feared that they might take away from the authority of Moses by doing so. Have you ever had a little envy when you heard someone speaking with authority that was contrary to your favorite leader? Think about this; have you ever felt a little envy when someone other than your favorite athletic receive well deserved honor? We must be on guard at all times that we do not have “envy” within our hearts.

Miriam & Aaron

(Numbers 12:1-2) *“And Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. ²And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it.”* In this chapter we have Aaron and Miriam speaking against Moses and the motive for this surely must be nothing other than “envy”. Miriam was the first to speak against Moses so she is mentioned first. Aaron came to recognize his sin and was forgiven. What I feel we should learn from the transgression of Miriam and Aaron is that their sin surely hurt Moses’ feelings. We may not realize it at the time but when we allow “envy” [i.e. jealousy] to rule our thoughts and words we are sinning. How do you think Moses must have felt when the children of Israel rebelled against him in the wilderness? But this must have hit Moses particularly hard as it was family who said in essence; “you are not so big, have you forgotten that God spoke to us when He called us to come to you to help you?” Here is another case where “envy” existed within a family.

Korah & others

(Numbers 16:1-3) *“Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: ²And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: ³And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?”* This man Korah rose up against Moses and Aaron and spoke openly against them and again the motive for such actions is “envy” as the text strongly suggests. An interesting fact that is evident in this account is that they were able to persuade others to join in their “envy”. In fact they persuaded at least two hundred and fifty to take sides with them. Can this happen today? It surely can; I believe that such envy is the cause of many church splits in the past and will be in the future if everyone does not control their envy.

Saul

Even those of authority may be found to have “envy”: (1 Samuel 18:8) *“And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom?”* Why was Saul so “wroth”? He was aware that his servants were showing respect to David and Jonathan. It probably enraged Saul when they simply called him “Saul” and did not address him as “King Saul”: (1 Samuel 18:7) *“And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.”* But the real reason was that he was envious and this prompted his anger. Saul did not consider that he was king and what else could he ask? Brethren, there is no just cause for us to be envious of one another; after all we are all “children of God”: [Galatians 3:26] *“For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.”* We are all “joint heirs with Christ”: (Romans 8:17) *“And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so*

be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.” What more could anyone ask for? Let us not make the same mistake that Saul made and harbor any “envy”.

Haman

When we are first introduced to Haman he and the king had just been invited to a banquet by Esther and he was very happy. But his mood suddenly changes when he saw Mordecai sitting in the king’s gate.(Esther 5:9-13) *“Then went Haman forth that day joyful and with a glad heart: but when Haman saw Mordecai in the king’s gate, that he stood not up, nor moved for him, he was full of indignation against Mordecai. ¹⁰Nevertheless Haman refrained himself: and when he came home, he sent and called for his friends, and Zeresh his wife. ¹¹And Haman told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. ¹²Haman said moreover, Yea, Esther the queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. ¹³Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate.”* After Haman arrived home he invited Zeresh and his wife to come to his home and he told them of all his riches and all the honors that that been bestowed upon him. BUT then he remembered that he had seen Mordecai sitting in the king’s gate; furthermore, he remembered that Mordecai did not so much as get to his feet nor did he move aside so Haman could pass by. Haman said that everything that he possessed and all the honors bestowed on him meant nothing because Mordecai was sitting there at the king’s gate. The queen had invited him to a party but he still had ‘envy’ because Mordecai was a gate keeper. How ungrateful can one be? Are we always grateful for the blessings we receive from God? We should be!

The Edomites

The Lord told the Edomites that because of their “envy” which was caused by their “anger and according to their hatred” He would make himself known among them”: (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.” This chapter is actually a prophecy of the destruction of Edom. The envy and hatred that the Edomites had for the Israelites led to bloodshed: (Ezekiel 35:5) *“Because thou hast had a perpetual hatred, and hast shed the blood of the children of Israel by the force of the sword in the time of their calamity, in the time that their iniquity had an end:”* The prophecy that God made to them was very harsh: (Ezekiel 35:14) *“Thus saith the Lord GOD; When the whole earth rejoiceth, I will make thee desolate.”* In verse eleven God promises them that He will do to them as their “envy and anger” had done to the Israelites. If we think that we can get by having “envy and anger” within our hearts perhaps it is high time that we read or are reminded of what God has done to others.

Princes

Princes became jealous and envious of Daniel: (Daniel 6:1-10) *“It pleased Darius to set over the kingdom an hundred and twenty princes, which should be over the whole kingdom; ²And over these three presidents; of whom Daniel was first: that the princes might give accounts unto them, and the king should have no damage. ³Then this Daniel was preferred above the presidents and princes, because an excellent spirit was in him; and the king thought to set him over the whole realm. ⁴Then the presidents and princes sought to find occasion against Daniel concerning the kingdom; but they could find none occasion nor fault; forasmuch as he was faithful, neither was there any error or fault found in him. ⁵Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God. ⁶Then these presidents and princes assembled together to the king, and said thus unto him, King Darius, live for ever. ⁷All the presidents of the kingdom, the governors, and the princes, the counsellors, and the captains, have consulted together to establish a royal statute, and to make a firm decree, that whosoever shall ask a petition of any God or man for thirty days, save of thee, O king, he shall be cast into the den of lions. ⁸Now, O king, establish the decree, and sign the writing, that it be not*

changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which altereth not. ⁹Wherefore king Darius signed the writing and the decree. ¹⁰Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime.

I know that was a lengthy reading but I felt it was necessary to get the complete picture. Darius set over his kingdom one hundred and twenty princes and over them three presidents. As the context illustrates they became envious of Daniel and they wanted him out; so they set forth to find fault with him, but they could find no fault with him concerning the kingdom of Darius [verse 4]. The only thing they could accuse him of was his faithfulness to God. Finding nothing with which they could accuse him they decided to set a trap for him. If you are ever put in Daniel's position what would you do? Would you continue to worship and pray to God or would you avoid the trap set for you? It is my hope and prayer that we would follow the example of Daniel.

Chief Priests

We now turn to the New Testament and consider the chief priests during the time of Jesus (Matthew 15:10-12) *“And he called the multitude, and said unto them, Hear, and understand: ¹¹Not that which goeth into the mouth defileth a man; but that which cometh out of the mouth, this defileth a man. ¹²Then came his disciples, and said unto him, Knowest thou that the Pharisees were offended, after they heard this saying?”* This chapter begins with the Pharisees accusing the disciples of Jesus of eating bread with unwashed hands: (Matthew 15:1-2) *“Then came to Jesus scribes and Pharisees, which were of Jerusalem, saying, ²Why do thy disciples transgress the tradition of the elders? for they wash not their hands when they eat bread.”* In verses three through nine Jesus convicts the Pharisees of being hypocrites; then he called the multitude unto him and teaches them what it is that will actually make a person unclean. After Jesus dismissed the multitude he went to a private house where his disciples came to him and asked him what the parable meant: (Mark 7:17) *“And when he was*

entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.” We can certainly understand why the Pharisees were offended by the words of Jesus; they knew in their hearts Jesus was correct in what he said. They ignored the commandments of God and followed after the traditions of the elders. They could observe how Christ kept all the commandments of God and this is what stirred up their envy. With envy they made up every false accusations of Christ that they could possible dream up. Every time they falsely accused Jesus they were actually defiling themselves. So you see once envy has prompted sin and there is no end to the sin that one will commit.

The Jews

After Jesus ascended into heaven and his church was established the Jews were envious of the apostles. We have record of their envy of the apostle Paul: (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.”* How large was this multitude? I cannot give you an answer but I can tell you where they were when this event took place: (Acts 13:14) *“But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down.”* I can also tell you that the whole city came to hear the words of Paul: (Acts 13:44) *“And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.”* I can only assume that this was a rather large crowd and this spurred envy in the hearts of the Jews. Some commentators suggests that the envy the Jews had was directed at the Gentiles because they were having the gospel preached to them; I don't agree with this because I cannot see them being envious of the Gentiles receiving the gospel when they rejected the gospel. I believe they were envious of the success Paul had in his preaching.

Perhaps you are wondering why Paul was doing this preaching in a Jewish synagogue on a Sabbath. Were the early Christians worshipping on a Sabbath? Didn't the early Christians come to gather on the first day of the week to worship? Of course we know the first day of the week was the day Christians worshipped: (Acts 20:7) *“And upon the first day of the*

week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.” (1 Corinthians 16:2) “Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.” What was Paul doing? He was preaching the gospel and he went where the most people would be and on the day they would be gathered together. Did he do anything that the other apostle did not do? Did they not preach the gospel everyday? (Acts 2:46) *“And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart”* Furthermore, the Lord will add to the church every day: (Acts 2:47) *“Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.”* Paul was not assembled with Christians on this Sabbath day; he went there to preach the gospel to a group of Gentiles. We Christians assemble for gospel meetings [which is not our regular worship service]; often times gospel meetings will extend through a Saturday [that is the day some would call a Sabbath]; this is done in an effort to preach and teach the gospel and this is exactly what the apostle Paul was doing.

On another occasion when Paul was preaching Jesus the Jews moved with “envy”: (Acts 17:1-5) *“Now when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews: ²And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, ³Opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ. ⁴And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few. ⁵But 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.”* This is another time in a different city [Thessalonica] that Paul went to the synagogue there and reasoned with them; verse two tells us this was Paul’s manner. Gill wrote this comment about verse two:

“Paul went to the Jews in their synagogue; for though the Jews had put away the Gospel from them, and the apostle had turned to the Gentiles; yet he still retained a great affection for his countrymen the Jews, and as often as he had opportunity, he attended their synagogues, in order to preach the Gospel to them;” I would only add this to Gill’s statement; yes he had affection for his countrymen but he also had a great concern for their souls and he preached Christ to them in hopes that some would obey the gospel.

According to verse five Paul was once again faced with the “envy” of the Jews. What was it that caused them to be envious? It was the success that Paul was having; the Bible tells us that many of the Jews and their proselytes were being converted to Christianity. Wherever Paul and Silas preached they were met with opposition and were persecuted. Every time they converted a Jew the other Jews considered the new Christians to be deserters. If you recall when the first gospel sermon was preached on the day of Pentecost there were about three thousands Jews who were converted to Christianity so I believe that “envy” was quit common among the Jews.

Here in Missouri the churches of Christ are among the smallest churches; we must be very careful that we don’t become like the Jews and have “envy” of the larger churches; as they envied Paul’s success in preaching the gospel. We cannot allow the size of our congregation to cause us to become discouraged; we must continue to preach the truth of the gospel as only the truth is pleasing to God.

Conclusion

In the King James Version of the Bible the word “envy” appears nineteen times and “envied” six times. Closely related to the word “envy” is the word “jealous” which appears sixteen times in your Bible and “jealousy” can be found thirty six times. So as anyone can easily learn we can conclude that God is strongly opposed to “envy” or jealousy.

Having stated with many words against “envy” I must admit that there are preachers whom I envy. One of these men that I envy is Larry

Yarber. I must confess that I envy his ability to quote scripture, to deliver a sermon of thirty to forty minutes without ever looking at a Bible or looking at notes. I will admit that I have my sermons mostly written out and for fear of not being able to bring out the points I intend refer to my lesson several times.

However, feel assured that I do not begrudge Brother Yarber's success; his ability is a gift from God and I am very happy that he is willing to use that ability for the furtherance of the kingdom of God. My "envy" for Brother Yarber is only filled with admiration and it is my prayer that he may have many, many years to serve God. Perhaps I should have said; I admire Brother Yarber and other preacher's ability to proclaim the gospel instead of saying I am envious of them. If you recall Paul said he was "the least of all apostles" this is how I feel about myself as a preacher, I am the least of all preachers.

I have overcome some "envy" in my life; if you know me you are probably aware of my love and desire to own a nice automobile. Years ago if I met a car on the highway that I really liked I would say something like this; "If I had that car and he had a broken leg neither one of us would walk". At which time my wife would give me a very stern scolding. I will admit that I still admire cars that I see and have to control myself not to be envious. This may sound petty to many of you but this is how easily that "envy" can creep into our lives and "envy" is something that every Christian must control because God does not us to be envious of each other or the possessions that another owns. My closing words to you is; "Don't allow "envy" to cost you your eternal life in heaven"!

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Buddy J. Duncan

Sedalia, Mo. 65301

Email: bdduncan01@charter.net

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