

## **“Love Does Not Envy”**

**1 Corinthians 13:4; 1 Samuel 18:1-16**

**June 23, 2019**

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### **INTRODUCTION:**

In our summer study of 1 Corinthians 13, the love chapter, we come today to the first of eight negative qualities of love. Love does not envy. Some translations use the word “jealous” instead of “envy.” The original word can carry both a positive and negative meaning. It is appropriate to be jealous *for* someone. A husband and wife are jealous for the protection of their marital love. God is a jealous God, meaning that he has a strong desire to protect his relationship with his people. The word here, however, carries the negative meaning of being jealous *of* someone. Instead of rejoicing in the good someone else has, you weep over the fact that you don’t have it. Envy leads us to the exact opposite place Romans 12:15 urges upon us. There Paul tells us to **“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.”** Instead of rejoicing with those who rejoice, envy leads us to rejoice with those who weep and to weep about those who rejoice. Frederick Buechner defines envy as “the consuming desire to have everybody else as unsuccessful as you are.”

Do you struggle with envy? There are many forms. Some envy the seemingly perfect bodies of others. Or perhaps it’s the envy of another’s husband, wife or children. It could be envy of another’s sense of humor or insightful intellect. There’s always the common envy of another’s money, house or car. The common mark of all envy is simply some level of pain at the success or blessing of another. That is the opposite of love. In his autobiography, the greatest British actor John Gielgud wrote these words: “When Sir Laurence Olivier played Hamlet in 1948 and the critics raved, I wept.”

Can you imagine the kind of love that doesn’t envy? I remember seeing an example of this last year with the NBA team, the Golden State Warriors. Their star player, Steph Curry, was out for several weeks with an injury. I remember seeing one of their televised games during this period when the team was playing very well. The camera focused on the bench, where Steph Curry was in street clothes. How did he respond when his team was doing so well without him? Was he pouting because he was no longer the center of everything? No, he was celebrating more enthusiastically than anyone else, waving a towel over his head and yelling and smiling in pure joy at the success of his teammates without him. That is a small glimpse of a life of love without envy.

Perhaps the best way to understand both the sin of envy and the life of love that is free of envy is to look at the story of the differing responses to David’s success in the life of King Saul and his son, Jonathan.

## I. The Destruction *from* Envy – v. 6-16

The setting of this passage is a victory parade after the Israelite rout of the Philistines following David's defeat of Goliath. As the Israelite army is returning, there is an understandable mood of exuberance and celebration. This isn't merely like a victory parade after your favorite team wins the championship. In this case, the victory represented freedom instead of slavery, economic abundance instead of poverty, life instead of death. In their exuberance, a group of women composed a song to mark the occasion. Verse 7 records the lyrics: **"Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands."** With that song, Saul's emotions turned immediately from joy to anger. The source of his anger was envy. **"They have ascribed to David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed thousands, and what more can he have but the kingdom"** (v. 8).

This story tells us several things about envy. The first is that envy robs us of joy, just as it did with Saul. He had the opportunity to celebrate this great victory, a victory both for himself as Israel's king and for the entire nation. But it all took a dark turn when envy arose in his heart and his joy was turned to anger. There is a sense in which envy is different from other sins. Most sins give at least a moment of pleasure before turning dark and miserable. Gluttony, lust, material indulgence and many other sins give at least a fleeting moment of pleasure. Not so with envy. It does the opposite and takes us immediately to a negative experience.

A second thing we learn about envy here is that it is rooted in a desire for glory. Saul wanted the glory of being celebrated, and he wanted that celebration to be rooted in his accomplishments as a mighty warrior. Like so many sins, envy is the abuse of a natural, God-given desire. The desire for glory is one of those natural, God-given desires. God has created us for glory, the glory of being his image-bearer. Paul is explicit about this in Romans 2, saying that God gives eternal life to those **"who seek for glory and honor and immortality"** (Ro. 2:7). Envy comes when we seek glory on our own, based on our accomplishments rather than in God's gifts to us.

Another lesson here is that envy usually arises in areas where we already possess some gifts. It was precisely because David was attributed with excellence in an area where kings were expected to deliver that Saul became envious. If the women had sung of David's excellent abilities as a shepherd or musician, Saul would not have responded with envy. Envy is a threat to the calling God has for us. My biggest struggles with envy are in the area of preaching and pastoring, because that is what God has called me to do. Specifically, I have to guard my heart against envy toward other pastors. If someone says to me, "Bill is a really good artist," there would be absolutely no temptation in my heart toward envy of Bill. The reason is that I am a terrible

artist. It could be said of most eight year olds that they are better artists than I, and I experience no pain whatsoever in admitting that. But if someone says, “I heard one of the best sermons of my life last week when I visited another church in our community,” that’s going to be a temptation.

One final lesson we learn from Saul’s envy is that it unleashes destructive forces in our lives. **“The next day a harmful spirit from God rushed upon Saul, and he raved within his house while David was playing the lyre”** (v. 10). The harmful spirit was an evil spirit, and the text says that it was from God not because God was the cause of this evil, but because it came with God’s permission. God’s hand of protection was somewhat removed from Saul in the wake of his envy of David. The text says that he “raved” within his house. It’s the same word used earlier of Saul prophesying under the influence of the Holy Spirit (10:11). Just as he had been under the control previously of God’s Spirit, he now comes under the control of an evil spirit.

Full of envy and under the control of this evil spirit, Saul attempts to murder David. **“Saul had his spear in his hand. And Saul hurled the spear, for he thought, ‘I will pin David to the wall.’”** David was a young man whose heroic deed with Goliath and had saved not only Saul but the entire nation. His music had calmed Saul on many occasions. But now he wants nothing more than to see his lifeless body pinned to the wall with a spear. Envy is a gateway drug to murder. Notice how murder and envy are linked in one of Paul’s lists of sins. In Romans 1, when he is describing the end result of those who reject God, he says, **“They are full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, maliciousness”** (Ro. 1:29). The 1984 movie *Amadeus* is about the envy of a composer named Salieri directed toward Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. The movie begins with his confession of his murder of Mozart as a result of that envy. Is there someone you have been murdering in your heart out of envy?

Let’s apply this before moving to our next point. Where does envy tempt you? It’s going to do so in an area where you already possess some gifts and abilities. It’s likely going to be of someone near you. Perhaps it’s a co-worker. Maybe it’s another woman who seems to you to have a perfect husband and children. Another way of asking this question is to ask if there is someone in your life about whom you would not be sad to hear some bad news. Most of us would be too polite to celebrate outwardly in such a case, but perhaps there would be an inward, quiet celebration in your heart. If so, you are vulnerable to the destruction that is unleashed at the sin of envy. And Paul says you do not love when your heart envies another. “Love does not envy.” What should you do if there is envy in your heart? That brings us to our next point.

## **II. The Destruction of Envy – v. 1-5**

If anyone should have been envious of David, it was Jonathan. He was the crown prince, the son of Saul who was in line to be the next king of Israel. Yet when he witnessed the David-Goliath battle and sensed David's heart for the Lord, Jonathan responded not in envy, but in love. It would seem that he recognized immediately that the successor to King Saul would be David instead of himself. His acceptance of that was indicated by two actions he took. First, he entered into a covenant with David. We're not told the exact content of the covenant, but it is likely that Jonathan pledged his loyalty to David, a loyalty he demonstrated more than once in the future. Second, he stripped himself of his robe and armor and gave them to David. The significance of this action is clear. Jonathan was the crown prince, and his clothing would have indicated this status. In giving these things to David, he is acknowledging that David is God's anointed king, not Jonathan. And he accepts it and submits to it.

Jonathan shows us the way to fight envy. The first thing he teaches us is that we must know the place God has for us and submit to that. In some way that is not revealed to us in the text, Jonathan discovered that he was not to be his father's successor as king of Israel. David was to occupy that position. Jonathan accepted this as God's will, and it delivered him from envy. What would have happened had he not accepted this? It would not have changed the outcome, but it would have changed Jonathan in all the wrong ways. That's what it did to his father. For all of Saul's stratagems against David, nothing produced the outcome he sought. At the end of our passage, we read that Saul demoted David. He had been set over **"the men of war"** (v. 5). This is a phrase used to describe Israel's elite soldiers. But at the end of the passage, we read that Saul made him **"a commander of a thousand"** (v. 13). Saul probably thought that David would be less successful in this diminished role, and perhaps would even manage to get himself killed. But it didn't work. God's hand was upon David and he **"had success in all his undertakings"** (v. 14). Saul grew more fearful and David more popular. So to fight envy, one of our helpful resources is simply to know the place God has for us, and then to maximize our effectiveness in that area rather than enviously seeking another. In other words, stay in your lane. Spend your mental, emotional and physical energy to work diligently in the area where God has called you and gifted you.

A second thing I notice is that Jonathan saved himself from envy by seeking the good of his potential rival, David. He **"loved him as his own soul"** (v. 3). I confessed earlier that one of my temptations in this area is to envy other pastors. One of the practices I have found helpful in fighting this is to pray for these brothers. Every week, I pray several times for God's blessings upon all the PCA pastors in our city. I pray that God would bless their ministries, anoint their preaching and strengthen their churches. I can't say that this practice has completely delivered me from all envy. But I can say that the envy is much reduced, replaced by a genuine desire to see these brothers flourish in their ministry.

Probably the biggest weapon at our disposal for defeating this monster of envy is this last one. It is to find our glory in God's anointed one. Jonathan realized that he would find his glory only under David, God's anointed king. For us, Jesus is God's anointed one, and he is the one in whom we find our glory. Envy is a flat comparison with only one other person. But when we expand the frame and bring God into the picture, finding our glory in him, we cut the legs out from under envy. We find our fullness in Christ, so we don't need to find glory in what we can achieve.

Two weeks ago, I was on a bike ride. It was threatening rain outside, so I wanted to stick closer to home than I normally would have. So I decided to ride from my house through Oak Mountain State Park. Quite by accident, I happened to time my ride through the park during the cycling portion of a triathlon. And also by accident, my timing was such that I was about a mile ahead of the young man in first place. It was an out and back race, so as I was riding through the park, I met the main body of the riders heading in the opposite direction. Many of them mistakenly assumed that I was the race leader, and not a few of them shouted out words of congratulations and encouragement. It was a moment of glory that I quite enjoyed, even though it was completely undeserved.

Finding our glory in Christ, God's anointed, is a dagger to the heart of envy. So let me remind you of some of the aspects of that glory. There is the glory of Christ's righteousness, given to us as a free gift. We read in our worship service last week from the Heidelberg Catechism the answer to the question, "How are you right with God?" The answer is that "God grants and credits to me the perfect satisfaction, righteousness, and holiness of Christ, as if I had never sinned nor been a sinner, as if I had been as perfectly obedient as Christ was obedient for me. All I need to do is to accept this gift of God with a believing heart." As a result of Christ's righteousness given to us, we will be able to gaze on the glory of God without dying. This glory is more beautiful and breathtaking than anything else you will ever see. Along with this, many other glories will be ours. There is the glory of resurrected bodies, the glory of being co-heirs with Christ and inheriting the entire earth with all of its wealth. There is the glory of being given authority over all creation, a glory man was given at creation but lost in his rebellion.

## **CONCLUSION:**

Our closing hymn expresses these truths quite well. "Let my hands perform his bidding, let my feet run in his ways; let my eyes see Jesus only. Let my lips speak forth his praise. Since my eyes were fixed on Jesus, I've lost sight of all beside; so enchained my spirit's vision, looking at the Crucified."