

**Love does not envy. Love does not boast. It is not proud.**

July 5, 2009 - 1 Corinthians 13:4b

I sat at a traffic light in my 1998 mini-van. It's a baby blue colored van with rust striping. Some person with a flashy sports car or SUV pulled up beside me. Their car has no scratches, no rust and it sparkled beautifully. I looked over at the driver. He is strong, tanned and talking on the latest blackberry. He looks over at me and takes a quick glance at my van. With a condescending nod, he looks away probably telling his jet setting friend in Paris about the loser next to him at the traffic light.

Well, I'll show him. I start scanning the alternative traffic light for a yellow light. I get ready. I am going to beat him off the line. The light turns yellow then red. I'm ready. But then there's a left turn green arrow advance. So I have to wait a few more seconds. Finally, the light turns green. I gun my 3 L engine and send that mini-van hurtling across the intersection. He doesn't know what's hit him. He's left in my exhaust. The exhilaration lasts for 2 or 3 seconds. Until he effortlessly blows by me probably flicking his cigarette ashes towards my tires.

“Why are you driving so crazy dad?” my kids inquire. “I'm not; I'm not. I just wanted to get away from the collapsing building back there before it fell on you.” Inside, I secretly wish for a massive radar trap ahead. I would love to drive by his flashy car pulled over by the police discussions. Instead, I must continue on at 60 km/ph while I wish for his demise. That was not a spiritual moment. But it was jealousy or envy.

It can raise its ugly head in the most unexpected places: at awards nights when your kid gets less awards than the neighbor, at a social event when your friend comes dressed in a smart new outfit, in an email when you hear about a colleague's promotion that you hoped for, at church when a young adult shows off their new boyfriend or girlfriend, when walking and you notice a beautiful home or garden or landscaping job.

Our world tells us envy is okay. In fact, it can even drive our economy. You must keep up with the Jones. So get more. But is envy and jealousy just a minor little unpleasantry that we don't need to show concern for? Could it be that an envious spirit reveals a much deeper heart problem – lack of love for others?

In fact, God has much to say about envy in His book. Here we learn that

**Godly love does not envy nor stir up envy in others.**

We are studying the love chapter, First Corinthians 13 this summer. We have seen that the Corinthian church had many gifted people. But they were a church with many problems. One of these surrounded spiritual gifts from the Holy Spirit. Some in the church had so-called dramatic gifts – speaking in tongues, interpretation of tongues, healings, miracles and prophecy. Some of these gifted people believed they were of higher importance than others in the church who did not have these gifts. Some flaunted their gift even if it took away from focus on God. Perhaps those who didn't have these gifts responded with anger and envy. It was so bad they were dividing over it.

Paul spends three chapters on this problem in 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians. Chapter 12 describes the problem and emphasizes the importance of everyone in the body. Chapter 14 describes the proper use of the gift of tongues. But the deeper issue was a lack of love. So Paul drops the love chapter in the midst of this discussion to lead them to the bigger

picture. They didn't know how to love God's way. Christians must love. You can't be a Christian and not love.

So Paul uses 15 words to describe love. Last week we looked at the first two: love is patient or suffers long and love is kind – seeing a need and then acting on it. After those two positive descriptions of love, Paul describes what love is not. It is here we will encounter envy.

So we seek to answer these questions as we consider envy today. What is envy? Is envy really that big of a deal? What does it mean to stir up envy? Why must we turn to Christ to overcome envy? At the end of our time, I pray the Holy Spirit moves in us collectively to express a desire to kill envy in our lives.

Please turn to 1<sup>st</sup> Corinthians 13.

**1 Corinthians 13 NIV**

<sup>1</sup>If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. <sup>2</sup>If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. <sup>3</sup>If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

<sup>4</sup>Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. <sup>5</sup>It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered,

it keeps no record of wrongs. <sup>6</sup>Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. <sup>7</sup>It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

<sup>8</sup>Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. <sup>9</sup>For we know in part and we prophesy in part, <sup>10</sup>but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. <sup>11</sup>When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put childish ways behind me. <sup>12</sup>Now we see but a poor reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

<sup>13</sup>And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

### **Godly love does not envy nor stir up envy.**

**What is Godly love?** Godly love is “agape” love defined by the cross.

It is a decision to offer self-sacrificing love for the benefit of others.

It’s not eros love which seeks others to find satisfaction in them. It seeks others to give love to them.

### **What is envy?**

The word translated envy is “zelow” in Greek. We get our English word zealous from this word. Zealous means to have a strong desire or to be passionate. This can be a very positive term.

Envy involves a corrupted zealousness. Envy describes a strong desire for what someone else has. I see your car. It is nicer

than my car. I have a strong desire to have your car for myself and I think negative thoughts about you because you have that car.

Or it can express a strong desire wishing others didn’t have what they have. If you follow this piece of envy to its end, the strong desire ends up wishing evil to come on that other person. So I see your car and since it’s a nicer car than mine, I wish you didn’t have it. Then I hear you got in an accident with that car and it’s written off. I delight in that news. My strong desire to see evil come upon you so you lose that which you have has been satisfied.

The zealous passion for something good becomes a jealous passion for something bad. Jonathan Edwards wrote this about the nature of envy: “Envy may be defined to be a spirit of dissatisfaction with, and opposition to, the prosperity and happiness of others as compared with our own.”<sup>1</sup> He also notes, “Some have compared envious persons to caterpillars, which delight most in devouring the most flourishing trees and plants.”<sup>2</sup>

Opportunities for envy abound. Someone’s business is doing better. They seem to get all the breaks. Those people have a nicer

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<sup>1</sup> Jonathan Edwards (1703-1758), *“Charity envies not.”--1 Corinthians 13:4*

home. They have a strong and happy marriage. She has a more considerate husband. He has a more sensitive and supportive wife. She's got a boyfriend. He got better grades.

We can be jealous of the apparent success of others in the church. Some can be jealous of those in leadership positions. Some can be jealous of those who appear to be more spiritually mature. This envy can even happen and often does happen among pastors.

I go to a retreat in May with other pastors. We study a book of the Bible under a Bible teacher or scholar. It is very tempting to be jealous when going there. Some of these guys pastor churches of thousands. Some have published books. Some teach in seminaries. Some travel extensively speaking at different meetings. Some publish articles. Some are more dynamic and well spoken than me. Some grasp the Biblical text better than me. Some are better read than me.

I find I can engage in a boomerang form of envy. I can feel those strong desires of envy arising within me. But instead of directing that negative feeling toward them, I direct it towards myself. Or maybe Satan directs it towards me. "Tom, you call yourself a

pastor? You think you're doing God's work? Why haven't you published books like him? Why haven't you led the church like that guy? Why don't you understand the Bible better? If I let those thoughts go or don't fight back against Satan's accusations, I can wallow in self-pity and jealousy. But love does not envy.

But some of you may be thinking, "Tom, you're making a mountain out of a molehill. So what if I have a little jealousy towards my neighbor's new RV. So what if I'm a little disgusted that she got that neat outfit before I did. So what if I trash her a little when catching up with my friends. It's just fun.

### **Is envy really that big of a deal?**

The Bible tells us the answer is YES! Paul says this to the church at Rome: <sup>13</sup>*Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy.* He places jealousy along with drunkenness and debauchery as indecent behavior.

In 1 Corinthians 3:3, Paul uses jealousy among the Corinthians as proof that they were worldly. <sup>3</sup>*You are still worldly. For since there is*

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<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

*jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere men?*

In his follow up letter to the Corinthians Paul writes: <sup>20</sup>*For I am afraid that when I come I may not find you as I want you to be, and you may not find me as you want me to be. I fear that there may be quarreling, jealousy, outbursts of anger, factions, slander, gossip, arrogance and disorder.*

In Galatians 5:21 envy is ranked among the abominable works of the sinful nature such as impurities, idolatries and witchcraft.

In 1 Timothy 6:4, Paul describes those who do not agree with the sound instruction of our Lord Jesus Christ and godly teaching. He writes *“he is conceited and understands nothing. He has an unhealthy interest in controversies and quarrels about words that result in envy, strife, malicious talk and evil suspicions.”*

In Titus 3:3, Paul mentions envy as one of the hateful sins Christians lived in before their conversion. *“At one time, we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another.”*

In James 3:14, 16, the Lord’s brother speaks of envy as exceedingly contrary to Christianity and connected with every evil work. *“But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth . . . For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.”*

Peter warns us against all envies that prevent our spiritual growth. 1 Peter 2:1-2 – *“Therefore rid yourselves of all malice and deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander of every kind. Like newborn babies crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good.”*

Envy has been a destructive sin since the beginning of time. It was Eve’s jealousy of God to which Satan successfully appealed. Cain’s jealousy of Abel’s sacrifice led to the first murder. Joseph’s brothers sold him into slavery because of jealousy for their father’s affection. Daniel was thrown in the lion’s den because of the jealousy of other advisors. Jealousy caused the elder brother to resent the father’s attention given the prodigal son.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> John MacArthur, *1 Corinthians*, MacArthur New Testament Commentaries.

Envy is no mere sin. It comes from Hell itself destroying relationships, families, ministries and churches. Love does not envy.

Not does it stir up others to envy. **What does it mean to not stir up others to envy?**

Paul goes on in the next descriptions of love to help us with this. Love does not boast. To boast means to call attention to oneself to elevate oneself above others. Look at what I've got; look at what I've done; look at how great I am; look at how great my kids are; look at what my kids have accomplished, look at who I'm dating; look at what I'm wearing; look at what I'm driving." The verb literally means to boast or vaunt oneself; to show plainly the glories that he or she has or is. Paul could be directing this to the Corinthians who called attention to their dramatic spiritual gifts.

C. S. Lewis called bragging the "utmost evil." It is the epitome of pride, which is the root sin of all sins. Bragging puts ourselves first. Everyone else, including God, must therefore be of less importance to us. It is impossible to build ourselves up without putting others down. When we brag, we risk provoking others to envy. If we hadn't

bragged, they might not even know what we accomplished or what we have.

The next word is similar. Love is not proud. It is not puffed up with pride, thinking oneself better than others, superior to others or arrogant. I love the definition the dictionary provides of arrogance – "excessively convinced of one's own importance."

Arrogance is a character trait of Satan. In Isaiah 14 and Ezekiel 28, God rebukes rulers for their arrogance. Many have seen these rulers having close kinship with Satan. After all, Satan thought himself so important that he led a rebellion in heaven against God. So lest we think arrogance is fun, remember it characterizes the most rebellious creature in the universe!

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So where do we go from here. Well, we could enter into a moralistic pep rally. Here is a good moral or virtue. Don't envy, don't boast, don't be proud. Let's try really hard. If I left you solely with those exhortations, I would simply be a moralistic preacher. This is exactly what other religions do. There would be nothing distinctive

about us. We would all be trying to be do moral good in our own efforts.

Then we all would leave here more heavily burdened than we came in. On top of the other burdens we carried in, we would add more effort to not envy, boast or be arrogant. We might be able to put on a good external front, but we know deep in our hearts those thoughts and desire still come. I have been studying this because I have great concern for putting our faith into action in dependence on the Lord, not on our own efforts – because that is what every other religion does

So for the Christian who truly wants to overcome envy not only externally, but in their heart, we **must turn to the work of Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit. How?**

Admit your sin.

Edwards poses these devastating questions. “Have we experienced desire to see the prosperous brought down? Have we not been glad to hear of anything to their disadvantage? And, in word or deed, have we not been ready to do that which might in some respect lessen their prosperity or honor?

And turning from the past to the present, what spirit do you now find as you search your heart? Do you carry any old grudge in your heart against this or that man that you see sitting with you from Sunday to Sunday in the house of God, and from time to time sitting with you at the Lord’s table? Is the prosperity of someone an eyesore to you? Does it make your life uncomfortable that they are higher than you? Would it not truly comfort you to see them brought down, so that their losses and depression would be a source of inward joy and gladness to your heart? And does not this same spirit lead you often to think evil, or to speak with contempt, or unkindness, or severity, of such, to those about you?”

We begin the journey of overcoming this by admitting, confessing these sins.

Admit your inability to kill sin on our own.

We can’t overcome sin through discipline or trying harder. Instead we must set our faith upon Christ for the killing of our sin. By faith, fill your heart with the knowledge of what God has done in the work of Christ to kill your sins. Fill your mind with what God provided through Christ to kill your sin. We do that by considering the fullness

of His grace, the richness and treasures of His strength, might and help that are found in Christ for our support. John 1:16 – *And from his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace.*

I love this prayer by John Owen. By faith pray, “I am a poor, weak creature. This corruption is too hard for me, and is the doorway to the ruin of my soul. I do not know what to do. My soul has become parched ground, and a habitation of dragons. I have made promises and broken them. I have made vows, but I did not keep them. Many times I have been persuaded that I have gained the victory, and that I should be delivered, but I was deceived. Now I plainly see, that without some great help and assistance, I will perish and be forced to abandon God.

But yet, I will lift up my hands that hang down, and strengthen my feeble knees, for behold, the Lord Jesus Christ as all the fullness of grace in His heart, and all the fullness of power in His hand. He is able to slay all of these enemies. There is sufficient provision in Him

for my relief and assistance. He can take my drooping, dying soul and make me more than a conqueror.” (Romans 8:37).<sup>4</sup>

Once we set our faith on Christ for the killing of our sins.

Raise up your heart in faith with an expectation of relief from Christ.

Consider His mercy, tenderness and kindness as He represents us as our great High Priest at the right hand of God. Remember Jesus constantly intercedes for you.

Consider the part that the Holy Spirit plays in killing sin.

He alone clearly and fully convinces the heart of the evil, guilt, and danger of the corruption, lust or sin that is to be mortified. John 16:8 – He convicts of sin. He alone reveals to us the fullness of Christ. He alone establishes the heart in expectant relief from Christ. He alone brings the cross of Christ into our hearts with its sin-killing power.

Ephesians 3:16 – I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through His Spirit in your inner being. He supports our prayers – The Holy Spirit intercedes on our behalf. Romans 8:26.

Ask and Open – Ask the Holy Spirit to do His work in your life; Open your life to His work – to kill these sins – to do a heart transformation so you can honestly rejoice at another’s success and remain humble about your own prosperities

None of that can happen apart from Christ. If you are a Christian, a person who has put their personal trust in Jesus Christ, that can change today. You must turn from these sins and turn to Christ. You must put your faith in Him and through that faith, God will save you. You will become a child of God. You will become a child of grace. You will receive the Holy Spirit in you and suddenly have that power to say no inside and out to sin that entangles.

Love does not envy nor provoke others to envy. Envy is deadly. We cannot kill these sins on our own. But by turning in faith to Christ and by the power of the Holy Spirit, we can overcome them. So then when a sparkling sports car puss up beside us at the red light, we can rejoice for the person and pray for their protection. Let us come to our Lord and Savior to receive His help now.

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<sup>4</sup> John Owen, *The Mortification of Sin*, (Carlisle, PA, The Banner of Truth Trust, 1656, 2007), 118.