

Envy

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[0 : 00] As we've looked at before in our study of themes and Proverbs, we find the themes scattered throughout the book. We're not going to read a long passage, but I'm going to read three short passages, which will come up, I think, on the screen, but also will be in your Bibles.

The first is from Proverbs chapter 3 and from verse 28 through to verse 32. Do not say to your neighbour, Go and come again, tomorrow I will give it when you have it with you.

Do not plan evil against your neighbour who dwells trustingly beside you. Do not contend with a man for no reason when he is done, you know harm. Do not envy a man of violence and do not choose any of his ways, for the devious person is an abomination to the Lord, but the upright are in his confidence.

And then from Proverbs chapter 14 and verses 29, 30 to 31, whoever is slow to anger has great understanding, but he who has a hasty temper exalts folly.

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, a peaceful heart gives life to the bones, but envy makes the bones rot.

[1 : 26] Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his maker, but he who is generous to the needy honours him. And then lastly in Proverbs chapter 23 verses 15 to 18, my son, if your heart is wise, my heart too will be glad, my inmost being will exalt when your lips speak what is right.

Let not your heart envy sinners, but continue in the fear of the Lord all the day, surely there is a future and your hope will not be cut off.

And I think maybe particularly that middle section where we read in Proverbs chapter 14 and verses 29 to 31, maybe especially these words, a tranquil or a peaceful heart gives life to the flesh and the bones of the body, but envy makes the bones rot.

I want to be as bright as she is, I want to be as good looking and gifted as him. I want that job that that other person got, I deserved it for sure.

I love the close friendships that they have, or that wealth, or the fun, or the house, the kudos, or the popularity or the power or the influence.

[2 : 57] I want the success that they have, the life they have. I envy my brother, I envy my sister, my father, my mother, my colleague, my Christian friend, my hero, whoever it is, I envy them.

I want what they have and I'm dissatisfied with what I have. We all know about envy, don't we? Nobody here doesn't struggle or battle with the sin of envy.

We all do to a greater or lesser degree. And so we're going to look at that theme for a little while from the Bible, from Proverbs this morning, particularly from Proverbs this morning, and recognize, as we read in our New Testament reading that Jesus picks it out as one of the sins also, that we are to deal with in our lives and hearts.

Because envy is the expression, the outward expression of something deeper. It's deeper malaise within our hearts and souls, and it has deep spiritual roots, because envy is linked very much in the Bible with the Father of all sins, which is pride, and it's closely related to that.

If you read Ezekiel 28 or Isaiah 14, which gives us a picture of Satan falling from heaven, this beautiful, glorious angel, pride was at the very root of his sin.

[4 : 30] Envy was at the root of his sin. He wanted what God had. He wanted to usurp God. He was discontented with his position in the cosmos, wanted the throne, wanted the worship of God.

That's what we see, don't we, even in the temptation of Jesus, that he said to Jesus, if you just fall down and worship me, he wanted that place that was God's rightful place alone, the power and the glory.

And so envy has these deep spiritual roots of pride that we battle with in our lives. And each of us can look at that this morning as we're listening to what Scripture is saying.

Don't wander too far into your own thoughts or you'll not listen to what's being said from the Word. But do let it seep into your thinking as we think through this passage.

Because clearly envy is uncovered in the Bible and it's uncovered as a heart issue. Jesus makes that clear, as with many other sins, but we're looking at envy today.

[5 : 36] It's not what we eat. It's not the black pudding and the haggis and these things that we eat that defile us. It's what comes out of us from our hearts spiritually.

Envy comes from deep within. So there's this great focus, scripturally always not on the outward circumstances and the outward behavior of other people that we can use to judge ourselves by, but rather look at our own hearts.

Because envy comes from a deep-seated dissatisfaction within our own hearts about our life and about our lot that God has given us.

They could be described as, or could be defined as a resentful, dissatisfied longing for another person's possessions, positions, fortune, achievements, success or personality.

And we often find that envy is one of the sins that are listed in the many lists of sins in the New Testament. We read it in Mark's Gospel when Jesus spoke about it.

[6 : 45] It's in Galatians and it's in other places where it's just elucidated as one of the practically made clear to us what sin is, so that we know it and we can deal with it and we can root it out from our lives.

It's very similar to covetousness. The commandment are also jealousy, but it's, there are slight differences. Envy is really a reaction, a negative reaction to something we don't have.

Whereas jealousy may be, the emphasis is a little bit more is a, not always a negative reaction, but usually a negative reaction to the threat of losing something we do have.

Envy however is never described positively in the Bible, whereas jealousy can be, you can be jealous, you can have a good jealousy, a protective jealousy. What is spoken of as being jealous for these people in a protective loving way, we don't want anything bad to happen.

So there is an element of jealousy that's good, although it can also be very negative. Whereas envy doesn't have any kind of positive element to it at all.

[7 : 56] Is that invisible, deadly sin that we all struggle with in our lives and will ship wreck us if it goes unchecked?

So the challenge of scripture, the challenge of worship always, the challenge of the word of God with it is always to allow the light of God's word, not into the person beside his heart, but into our heart to allow God himself to just work on our heart and to unleash some of the darkness that we allow to reside there by not dealing with it, by not challenging ourselves.

And obviously what we'll do is we'll finish very positively, which is very important so to do. But where does envy leave us in our lives?

Because envy is such a negative thing. Now we recognize that it leaves us dissatisfied with God. Proverbs 14.30 says, a heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

And we know that there's so much in the New Testament and in the Bible about peace, only being possible with us in our deepest hearts when we are right with God, when we have dealt with our dissociation with God because of sin and we've come to Him for salvation.

[9 : 30] But we recognize that envy leaves us dissatisfied with God. It's the opposite of tranquility and a healthy heart. The word tranquil there can mean peace or health that comes from knowing and fearing and loving God.

It's envy is rotten and it's destructive and it separates us from God. So it leaves us dissatisfied with God so that we may spend our time blaming God for how badly our life is turning out.

It may be unspoken, but it's at the root of some of what we think. Yeah, a deep unhappiness with our lot in life, an unhappiness with who you are, an unhappiness with the gifts or the lack of gifts you feel you have or the way your life has turned out or where your life has turned out.

You want to be someone different. You're dissatisfied with the opportunities, with the dead end job, with the poverty, with the ill health, with the character that you have, with the missed opportunities, the circumstances, the unfairness, the inequality.

You would do a better job than God. You would change things because you're envious of everyone else and what they have and you're even envious of God's position of control and sovereignty and power.

[10 : 45] In fact, that one level envy is not only dissatisfaction with God, it's wanting to be God. It's wanting to have that position of power and authority and control so that we can receive all that we want, that we don't have, that we think we need from God in our lives.

And as such, it not only leaves us dissatisfied with God, but therefore dissatisfied with the gospel. So I speak first of all to Christians here because it's easy for us, I think, as Christians to theoretically or theologically accept the gospel and accept what Jesus has done for us and accept that we are sinners saved by grace and that we are going to heaven and all these things, but still let envy rule in our hearts.

We can still be those who are ultimately blaming God with a sense of dissatisfaction in our lives, we don't trust what He says about our identity as His child, our unique identity.

We don't trust the wisdom of the gifts He has given you or the promises that He's made to you to provide everything that we need. Trust in the Lord with all your heart.

We sang that in the song and the Psalm that we sang. We don't think about and consider the future that He has promised us and the gospel doesn't seem that significant, so we still are...

[12 : 08] It's not really the answer that's providing all our needs and all our desires. And it's not Him that we desire alone. We are envious and desiring things we don't have and we feel God is to blame.

The salvation of a crucified Jew a long time ago doesn't seem so significant on my Monday morning walk. It may seem fairly relevant on the Lord's day when we're in church, but it doesn't seem to be something that moves and directs and channels and changes and transforms my heart from Monday to Saturday.

The cost, the love, the resurrection, the promises seem very distant as we envy and consider what we don't have.

Because the gospel sometimes practically isn't what we are putting into practice in our lives. And maybe you're not a Christian here today, maybe you're agnostic, maybe you're an atheist, maybe you've just stumbled into church.

And you've never even considered the thought of envy or the gospel even, maybe. But you do recognize that you're chasing something that you don't have and you think other people do, other people do have.

[13 : 24] Your circumstances, good breaks, natural gifting and you're envious. But you don't recognize or consider that the fundamental problem is one that is within you, that's within your own heart.

And you've never considered the relevance of the gospel to that. You can't think how it will satisfy your deepest longings. And maybe you're there today and I would ask and encourage you to consider the gospel of Jesus and the power of Jesus, the resurrected power of Jesus to transform your heart and to change it from within.

And indeed for all of us, every one of us. So envy is that problem is that it makes us dissatisfied with God and very unhappy with other people because their lives seem so much better than ours.

Do not envy Proverbs 3.31, the violent or choose any of their ways. And you know, Sam 73 as we mentioned and Sam 37, they really deal with that issue.

They really deal with that heart condition where we're looking at other people and saying, especially those who are not, if we're Christians, especially those who are not Christians, we're saying, they seem have so much fun.

[14 : 38] Life is so good. You know, they want to give it a temptation. They don't have any barriers or parameters around them spiritually. They're so successful. They're so powerful. They're such a great company.

They have such good lives. They don't have the weight of fearing the Lord or the commands of God or the ethical dilemmas or the persecution and the mockery that we go and know as believers.

And we envy them. We envy those who don't believe. And we also envy some, whether they believe or whether they don't.

And that comes very much under the commandment, doesn't it, which looks at anyone. It doesn't necessarily need to be an unbeliever for a Christian. It can be anyone.

The last commandment, you, Jude 1 and 5, you shall not covet your neighbour's wife. You shall not set your desire on your neighbour's house or land as male or female servant, as ox or donkey or anything that belongs to your neighbour.

[15 : 38] Now we might not be troubled so much with envy about a donkey or about, you know, as ox or as servants, maybe not the immediate things that we envy in people.

But you know, the principle is behind what is being said there. The covetousness, the envious, that we might want our fellow Christian or some other person's husband or wife or life or possessions or sense of humour, whatever we don't have and they have, we want.

So covetousness makes us unhappy with others also. And so we come to the problem of envy, which we've unpacked there and to a little degree, is its total destructiveness.

Envy rots the bones. Such a great picture. Such a clear picture from Proverbs 14.30, a heart of peace gives life to the body. Envy rots the bones.

Just like a heart cancer. It's that entirely negative emotion or sin within us. Proverbs 27.34, his anger is cruel, fury overwhelming, but who can stand before envy or who can stand before jealousy?

[16 : 56] So you've got it comparatively worse than anger and fury because it has such destructive powers. There's nothing pleasurable in the sin of envy.

Nothing enjoyable about it. It's mean because it comes from a heart of entitlement and thanklessness. It's entirely negative.

Unlike as we mentioned, jealousy, which at least can have a protective element that is positive. Envy rots the bones.

It brings death to us. Not life. It's like trying to drink salt water to slake our thirst. It feeds our heart with desires that will not satisfy us even if we receive them.

It leaves us with that nagging dissatisfaction in our ongoing life. And it spills into every relationship. And I want to stress that and I'm going to come back to that at the end.

[18 : 01] It affects our relationships. It affects our relationship with God and also our day-to-day relationships within the church. Galatians 5, New Testament epistles, often dealing with heart sins that affect the church and affect our relationships.

So Galatians 5, 25, since we live by the Spirit, the Spirit of God, let's keep in step with the Spirit. Let's not become conceited, proud, provoking and envying one another.

So you've got that practical outworking within the New Testament. Or also, I think in Titus 3, verse 3, it says, 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. You see the parallels and the connections between envy and hatred and division and discord.

And isn't that such a powerful reality that the church of Jesus, the believers in Christ as part of a community, are to reflect an opposite spirit and an opposite way of thinking about one another and about God, which causes us to look into our own heart and to deal with that.

[19 : 25] Just what we find is if we're living with an envious spirit, an envious heart, it spreads unhappiness and cynicism. And it has a lack of enthusiasm for all things God.

So while it may seem to be an invisible sin, you say, no one can see how envious I am. That's okay. It's good. But it isn't really because it's like what Jesus says in the passage we read, whatever's within us comes out.

It comes out in various ways and at different times in our lives when maybe our circumstances dictate that that to be the case.

Its pale reflection, complexion can't be hidden. It's unhealthy pallor casts a shadow wherever it's found. You know how it is, don't you?

How much a misery guts can affect the temperature in a room. Now someone who is uncharitable and quick to find fault and quick to expose somebody else's failings from an envious heart potentially, someone has nothing good to say.

[20 : 35] It may be a heart. It is undoubtedly a heart issue, but it spreads misery and we need to recognize our responsibility as part of the body of Christ to deal with our heart.

So as we come to a conclusion, it's been all very negative, sorry. Let's try to rejoice. It's time to rejoice in God's amazing grace.

We recognize in Proverbs chapter 23 and verse 17, do not let your heart envy sinners, but always be zealous for the fear of the Lord.

And we've seen that that is a theme throughout Proverbs is this recognition of a relationship with God as Savior and Lord. And again, going back to 1430 of Proverbs, a heart of peace, a tranquil

heart, a healthy heart gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.

So we recognize that the redemption that we receive in Jesus Christ coming to Him for our Savior, saying to Him, I recognize that this is an issue in my life, I recognize I'm dissatisfied and envious and sometimes very unhappy with you God and with other people recognizing that sin and coming to Him for in confessing that and seeking His forgiveness brings tranquility and peace of health to our souls and also to our bodies at that.

[22 : 01] A wholeness, you know, the New Testament speaks about that, doesn't it? Life to the full. It's a wholeness that we receive from God in our lives. His work is regenerating hearts, broken hearts with eternal life.

And He has done that because He, what did He do? He emptied Himself. He emptied Himself and took what nobody else wanted, you know, none of you wanted the cross.

None of us wanted the cross. None of us want the wrath of God. We're not envious for that. We're not envious for the judgment of God, for the light of God's judgment to, the bright light of God's judgment to look into our heart and say, guilty.

But He took that in His selfless love. He took that wrath, He took that judgment. He took what nobody else wants and what nobody else could deal with and nobody else could stand in front of and He took it on the cross, the Father's wrath, emptying Himself of all His glory, showing Himself to not care at that level about His glory to the degree that He became the Son of Man, the one who died in the cross.

And that therefore, as we come to Him in humility and in grace, enables us to deal with that lifelong challenge that we have, which is to remove envy from the very core of our heart and replace it with God's love and God's grace.

[23 : 34] Because God's love is what transforms us. So you've got the passage that's often read at weddings, don't you? And we're very well known to us. 1 Corinthians 13, and it's nice and it's beautiful and everyone loves it and it gives different characteristics of love.

But it reminds us that there's also negative sides to that love because it says love is pain, the love of God in our lives is love is patient, love is kind, it does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. Again, pride is linked together with envy and it is the opposite, and the hatred and the opposite of His love. And so we find that Christ enables us to love God as our Creator, as our judge and our Savior and to stop blaming Him and to stop asking Him for things that we don't need, even though we may want them, and believe that He knows better and we trust Him and that takes faith and that takes that gift of faith which He promises in the hardest and most difficult circumstances.

That is a real challenge for us. I'm not saying this is easy, I'm not saying it's cheap and I'm not speaking in a trite way.

It's an impossible battle that we need the Holy Spirit for to love God, but also it enables us not only to love God but to love ourselves because God brings that tranquility, that peace, and that life to our body envy rots the bones.

[25 : 15] And peace comes when we not only love God, but we actually love ourselves because that is absolutely right because we see ourselves as God sees us, valuable and precious.

We come to Him by faith, we become His children, and we are enabled to love ourselves because what envy is, is envy is wanting to not be yourself, it's wanting to be someone else.

It's envy is, it's root is not self-love, it's root is self-hatred. We don't love ourselves, we don't love ourselves as God loves us, we hate ourselves and we hate what we are.

And so it's root is not self-love, it's self-hatred. But to know Christ's love and to know His salvation is to recognize that we are His children, to recognize that we are adopted into His family and recognize He has made us unique.

There's no other person in the universe like you, you're uniquely you, He's chosen that. And we're all different. And so it enables us to love ourselves and it also enables us to love others.

[26 : 28] And that's a great thing. Envy stops us from loving others. It really makes us hate other people because we want what they have, but love and being transformed in our hearts and dealing with envy enables us to give thanks for the gifts of other people.

And to, it drives us back to the gospel. Maybe today we didn't think, I didn't really think I needed to pray today, there's nothing to pray about, I can't think of anything to pray about. When we recognize what we are naturally in ourselves, we're always driven back to the cross, but how hard it is for us to give thanks for others who are much more gifted and have a much better life than we think that they

have.

And the reality is maybe they don't anyway, because we don't know their hearts and we don't really know their circumstances. All we see is what they are presenting on the outside, and of course Instagram and Twitter and all these things makes that all the more surface and drives in many ways envy in our lives.

But we don't need what they have. Rather we give thanks for what we've been given and we rejoice in what they have. It lays pride and the need to have more and more and more that we think we need at the foot of the cross and live a life of gratitude and thankfulness and prayerfulness and joy in the privileges and the giftings of others.

Now that will change our DNA. It changes our own personal DNA, but it will also change the DNA of our church all the time.

[28 : 05] And what the world needs to see is a community of people who reflect Jesus. And that's where we reflect Jesus. It's not in the slapstick smile. It's not in the quality of our praise.

It's not even in the numbers that we have in church. It's in the way that our hearts are being transformed and that we are brothers and sisters and dealing with all the sins that would separate us from one another.

So as we close, the focus might be that all of us would examine our hearts and examine our interactions with one another and our thoughts about one another. And we would be the people who become the champions of change.

You and me, that we become the champions of change. You and I are the ones who put envy to death. And as you walk from here, see transformation in your office, in your neighborhood, in the church life, in the family, online, on Zoom.

That it's changed because of your heart attitude being changed and my heart attitude being changed. Let's be the ones who are... Let's be the ones who are those who enable change to happen rather than being the ones who reflect a heart that's closed to the light of Jesus Christ.

[29 : 28] Let's be those who spread grace and not misery. And that's a great challenge for us this morning, I think. And I close with the words of a good friend of mine.

The friend of ours, he's preached here and he does a daily Bible reading, some of our American friends may or may not know him, Scotty Smith, but he writing on this subject said, if I had everything, I covet and want.

It would never be enough. In gratitude is a soul cancer. Comparison is heart disease. An envy is a relentless idol factory.

Indeed, only Jesus, the riches of grace and the provision of heaven are enough. Let's bow our heads and pray and give thanks.

Father God, we thank You for who You are. We thank You for the searing honesty of Scripture that may leave us today uncomfortable.

[30 : 27] Sometimes when we look at the mirror physically, we look and we think, oh, I'm so ugly. And we walk away and we forget.

And spiritually, it's easy for us to do the same, to look in the mirror of Scripture and see the reality, but just quash it or forget it or fail to deal with it.

And yet, You're the great surgeon. You're the great healer. You're the great physician who seeks to use the scalpel of Scripture to root out the cancer and the sin that does make us, has that root of hatred and dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

And You want that to be removed so that we may know that tranquility and that peace and that life that You bring. And we know it's a battle and we know we can't deal with it on our own. And we know we can't change our hearts without Your grace and without Your help.

So help us today, we pray, and enable us to be thankful and rejoicing in Jesus' willingness to change us and to renew us and to transform us.

[31 : 40] We know it takes a lifetime, Lord, but give us the patience within that also to know that even though we die, yet we will live and that the best is still to come.

We ask it in Jesus' name. Amen.