

7 Deadly Sins: Envy
Exodus 20:17; James 3:13-18
WRCoB 8.18.19

You ever notice how in a room full of toys
Two children will often fight for the same one?

One starts playing with the stuffed brown cow
And the other just won't rest until she has it.

So when the first finally gives up the brown cow
The second becomes quite content
Until the first begins to play with the green tractor

Completely forgotten is the stuffed brown cow
And they fight now for the green tractor.

When the second child finally wrestles the toy away
And the first child begins to cry
There's this smug look of triumph . . .

Until of course
The first child picks up the stuffed brown cow again
And the battle starts all over.

This is what we want to talk about today.

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Today we look at envy the sixth of the 7 deadly sins.

You've heard the idiom someone is green with envy.
Green being the color of a sick person.

The Bible agrees: **Proverbs 14:30 (NIV) A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.**

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Paul tells us in ***Romans 12:15 Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.***

An envious person does just the opposite.

An envious person weeps over those who rejoice
And rejoices over those who weep!

While pride, our topic for next week
Looks down upon another with haughty arrogance.

Envy looks up to the other with seething resentment.

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But wait, before we go too far into our discussion
We need to look at the definition of envy.

We use envy, jealousy, and covetousness interchangeably.

In fact, comparing different Bible translations
The word envy in one translation
Might be jealousy in another.

There are distinct differences between the words.

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Let me use the illustration of a dance floor.

According to the dictionary, jealousy is “*being very watchful or careful in guarding or keeping what someone possesses.*”

Ok, so my wife is dancing with someone on the dance floor.

They are enjoying one another way too much.

I am . . . what? . . . I am jealous

Because I'm fearful of losing something . . . my wife.

That's jealousy.

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Covet, on the other hand

Means *desiring to have what your neighbor possesses.*

This time this someone is out on the dance floor

Dancing with his wife and she too is very beautiful

And I begin to wish she were my wife.

That's covetousness.

It's not jealousy because it's not what I possess

But what my friend possesses

That makes me covet.

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Envy is something altogether different.

Envy is a feeling of resentment

Directed towards the one

For what he/she has that you don't have.

Ok, so this time, while I am coveting the man's wife

Out on the dance floor

I begin to resent him.

In fact, I wish he would drop dead.

Now that's envy.

Jealousy seeks to protect what one possesses.

Covetousness desires what someone else possesses.

Envy resents the one who possesses

What you are coveting.

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Envy was at the root of Cain's anger

When he killed his brother, Abel, in a fit of rage.

Envy caused Joseph's brothers

To sell him to slave traders on their way to Egypt

Envy caused King Saul to despise young David

When the crowds in Jerusalem were chanting

“King Saul killed a thousand enemies . . .

But David has killed ten thousand.”

And it was envy that caused the elder brother

To resent his younger brother, the prodigal son

When their father wanted to celebrate his return.

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Envy operates in three ways.

First, envy follows success.

Envy looks at the success of others and says

“Why her? And not me?”

Envy takes issue with someone else's good fortune.

And questions why that same good fortune shouldn't be his.

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The second way envy functions
Is that envy operates close to home.

In other words, we envy those who are our peers
Those on the same level as we are
Socially, financially, and professionally.

For instance, I do not envy Charles Stanley
Frederick Buechner, or Fred Craddock
All celebrity preachers if you will.

Their status is too lofty for me to consider ever achieving.

I can openly admire them and their success.

However, I can envy a minister in the CoB.
For their ministry successes.

I can envy the minister who is asked to preach at AC.

Though I might congratulate them on their success
Deep down inside I am asking
"What do they have that I don't have?"

The author of *Catch 22*, Joseph Heller puts it this way:

There is no disappointment so numbing . . . as someone no better than you achieving more."

Envy develops when a friend or a peer
 Gets the better grades
 Dates the prom king or queen

Or earns the promotion you've been wanting.

On the outside we're all congratulatory
 But on the inside we're seething with resentment.

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The third way envy operates is through
 What is called *mimetic desire*.

According to the philosopher Rene Girard
 We tend to imitate other people's desires.

If someone desires something
 We have a tendency to desire it too.

So in the case of the two children in the room full of toys

The one child is playing with the stuffed brown cow.

The other child comes into the room.

What toy does she want to play with?
 Yep! The stuffed brown cow.

Why?

Because the first child seems so happy playing with it.

The child's desire makes the toy valuable.

When we covet we simply desire the object of worth
The neighbor's wife
The stuffed brown cow
The successful church.

In mimetic desire we compare ourselves
To the person that possesses the object we desire.

“Why does he have it? And not me?”

When the second sees the first child
Playing with the stuffed brown cow.

She wants the toy not because of its worth.

She wants to experience the joy the first child is having.

In mimetic desire
We wish we WERE that other person.

When that happens
We will never, ever be content.

Envy produces discontent.

An envious person can never be happy.

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Often times envy motivates a person towards success.

Well you might ask “is that so bad?”

Well, in a financial and social way, probably not.

An envious person can be very successful.

But if it's envy that motivates a person towards success
Deep inside their bones are rotting.

An envious person will never be at peace.
They are driven and never satisfied.

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Ask yourself, "How do I feel about the success of my peers?"

Do I celebrate their successes?
Or do I resent their accomplishments?

Are you their biggest fan? Or worst critic?

Dorothy Sayers said, "*Envy begins by asking plausibly:
'Why should I not enjoy what others enjoy?' and it ends by
demanding: 'Why should others enjoy what I may not?'*"

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I think there is a correlation between envy and self-esteem
The lower the self-esteem, feelings of self-worth
The more one is prone to envy.

If you are not content with who you are
You will always be envious of others.

A Christian's self-esteem comes through
Their relationship to Christ Jesus.

When, at a gut level, one comes to the heart knowledge
Of God's magnificent love and grace

When we really know his love for us . . .
Down, down, deep, deep within our soul

That God in Jesus loves us so much
That he willed to come in the flesh as a man
Willing to relinquish his life
To reconcile each of us unto him.

Think for a moment
What that might do to one's self-esteem?

When we become aware of the grace of God in Jesus
We no longer need to compare our self with others.

We find our self-worth in our relationship to God.

Hear the words of the great Baptist preacher
Of the 19th Century, Charles Spurgeon.

The cure for envy lies in living under a constant sense of the divine presence, worshiping God and communing with Him all the day long, however long the day may seem.

True religion lifts the soul into a higher region, where the judgment becomes more clear and the desires are more elevated. The more of heaven there is in our lives, the less of earth we shall covet. The [love] of God casts out envy.

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When we experience grace
We become grateful and gracious.

When we are grateful
We discover peace and contentment.

When we are grateful, we become gracious
For what God has done in the lives of others
And count as blessings their good fortune.

For it is only with a grateful heart that we can fight envy.

Grateful people are not envious people.

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And so, the next time you find yourself envious
Over your neighbor's good fortune.

Remember the redeeming love of God.

Replace your envy with gratitude.

Grateful for the blessings you have
And for the blessings your neighbor has too!

That will go a long way in the building of God' kingdom
Here on earth . . .
Let us pray.