

“THE SIN OF ENVY”  
Sinning Like a Christian #3  
Genesis 37:1-4, Daniel 6:1-5, Acts 17:1-9  
September 18 & 19, 2021

“According to an ancient Greek legend, a certain athlete ran well but placed second in the race.

The winner was encompassed with praise, and eventually a statue was erected in his honor. Envy ate away at the man who had placed second. He resented the winner, and he could think of little else. Eventually he decided to destroy the statue of the winner.

“Night after night, he went to the statue under cover of darkness, chiseling away at the base to weaken the foundation. But one night as he chiseled in violent anger, he went too far. The heavy marble statue teetered on its base and crashed down on the disgruntled athlete. He died beneath the weight of the marble replica of the man he had grown to hate.

“His own envy had destroyed him.”<sup>1</sup>

What a fitting start to our discussion of the second of the Seven Deadly Sins – Envy. We learned at the beginning of our series how the Seven Deadly Sins are often innocent-looking from first glance. They can also be viewed as virtues by our world today, but they are actually so deadly to all who embrace them as we discover their true nature within the human spirit. Envy is a murderer.

Last week we learned of the insidious work of Pride that always drives us toward achieving the #1 position, the top of the heap, the best of the best, even if it means walking on the backs of those around us to get there. While we can be moved toward greater achievement with a healthy sense of Pride, an overwhelming perception of Pride in our lives causes us to become arrogant, egotistical, and even dangerous, as we begin to look at others around us with disdain, contempt and even outright hatred. And we see some of those same tendencies happening when we consider Envy.

J. I. Packer states it clearly when he wrote, “**Envy is one of the most cancerous and soul-destroying vices there is...**It is terribly potent, for it feeds and is fed by pride, the taproot of our fallen nature.”\*

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<sup>1</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 271)

Feeding off of Pride, Envy now covets the #1 position. The runner in the opening story died trying to get there. His resentment in Envy for the one who was a little bit better than he was killed him. Instead of being content to be second place, this runner was so driven by Envy that he did whatever was necessary to eliminate the one who was better than he was.

And we see it in our Old Testament lesson of Genesis 37:1-4. These verses are the beginning of the account of how the sons of Jacob (Israel) turned on their brother Joseph because of the special treatment he was receiving from his father. Their Envy of Joseph was so strong that we are told, “...*they hated their brother so much that they would not speak to him in a friendly manner*” (37:4). And those feelings of Envy became so strong with in them that their feelings became thoughts, and their thoughts became actions, and their actions became murderous.

Envy grew in each one of them so greatly that it became a cancer to their thinking, and began to destroy their souls. Instead of looking at all they had received from their father, they began to criticize all that Joseph had. “**Criticism is nothing more than low-grade Envy.**”\*\*

You see, Joseph at that time, was the youngest of the sons of Jacob (Israel). And like any family of more than one child, sibling rivalry eats away at the relationship between them as they compare themselves with each other. And when the youngest of the bunch gets the greatest amount of love and attention, Envy steps in and begins to destroy the older brothers. All they could see, all they could think about, all they could talk about, was how much they hated Joseph, and how much they despised the favorable treatment that their father, Jacob, was showing to him. It consumed them to the point that they decided they had to do something about it, and their choice was to tackle him, strip him of the colorful robe of many colors, and throw him into a hole in the ground with plans to kill him (37:18-20).

Please understand, “Envy is more than jealousy. Jealousy is...more a crime of passion, a more active, resourceful sort of sin than Envy. Envy attempts to keep to itself, is shy to reveal its real feelings, seethes, and stews in resentment because of the good fortune of another...**Envy is a sort of refined, subtle form of hatred**...Envy is less obviously sinful than crude, publicly expressed hate, but

it can be no less deadly.”<sup>2</sup> That’s why the other brothers sold Joseph to the Ishmaelites traveling to Egypt (37:27-28), then took his robe, dipped it into goat’s blood, and took it to their father, asking, “*Does it belong to your son?*” (37:32). They did not ask ‘does this belong to our brother,’ but instead asked their father, ‘does this belong to your son?’ Their Pride stirred up their Envy to the point of discarding their own brother so that they might find greater love from their father.

Erwin Lutzer describes Envy this way, “Envy is rebellion against God’s leading in the lives of His children. **It’s saying that God has no right to bless someone else more than you.**”\*\*\*

The Envy in Joseph’s brothers was so great that they believed that it was wrong for God to bless Joseph more than them. And it led them to hatred. However, that did not increase their father’s love for them, but rather focused Jacob’s attention more on Joseph by grieving for his son’s “death.” Their plan backfired against them as Envy always does. Instead of receiving more love and attention from their father Jacob, the brothers now had to endure his grieving for the very brother they had secretly sold into slavery for 20 pieces of silver. Thankfully, God had bigger plans for Joseph, and in the years to follow, used him to save his own family from famine and possible extinction.

The Envy of their brother led the sons of Jacob to action against Joseph, but it also continued in each of their own lives. Envy doesn’t just end once action has been taken to “right the wrong” we think has been done to us. Envy only grows deeper and stronger within us, and it leads us further and further away from God’s leading. We begin to Envy more and more people to the point that we are dominated by it. **Unless we repent of it, Envy eats at us and slowly consumes us.**

And we see that in the lesson of Daniel 6:1-5. Daniel, the Jewish exile taken into Babylon during the reign of King Nebuchadnezzar (Daniel 1:6), had demonstrated his leadership ability as he trusted in the Lord God Almighty for guidance and direction in his life (Dan. 1:8). As a result of his faithfulness in following the Lord, Daniel was promoted to one of the highest positions within Babylon in service to the king (Dan. 1:19-21). And God used him in a mighty way to influence the kings of

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<sup>2</sup> (William Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian*, [Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2005] pg. 50)

Babylon, warning them chastising them, and calling them to follow the Lord God Almighty.

Then, under the rule of Darius, Daniel is lifted up as the second of the whole empire to supervise the governors of the kingdom and to administer the whole of the king's interests. But because of his proficiency, the other supervisors and governors desired to find something wrong with Daniel in order to have him removed from office so that they might take over (Dan. 6:4). Envy drove them to do whatever was possible to get rid of Daniel so that they could step into his place.

Leslie Flynn describes Envy like this, “**The envious man feels other’s fortunes are his misfortunes; their profit, his loss**; their blessing, his bane; their health, his illness; their promotion, his demotion; their success, his failure.”<sup>+</sup>

You see, because of their Envy, Daniel's promotion to second in command was seen as their demotion to them. Daniel's success was their failure. Daniel's leadership blessing was their misery. Since Daniel was calling them all to higher levels of integrity, his leadership prevented them from indulging in the profits of the kingdom. So they hated Daniel for his righteousness. They were daily reminded of his position and his leadership and they resented Daniel for it. So great was their Envy of Daniel that they hatched a plan to eliminate him from his position so that they could enjoy the spoils of Babylon. Their Envy stirred up their Greed to the point that they were willing to do anything just to get rid of him.

“When we Envy someone, we tend to magnify that person's good fortune while at the same time minimizing our own. The sun seems to shine more brightly upon them than us. They appear to live a charmed life. We, on the other hand, must be the victims of lousy luck. In Envy, there is a kind of diminishment of ourselves which is one of the things that makes this sin so sad.”<sup>3</sup> Rather than look at what they had as supervisors and governors of Babylon, they looked at what they didn't have all because of Daniel. And because he was the one standing in the way of achieving what they wanted, they plotted a way to remove him. Because of their ambitions, because of they had set their sights high for

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<sup>3</sup> (Willimon, *Sinning Like a Christian*, pg. 51)

themselves, they set their sights upon Daniel to get him out of their way so that they could become the ones in power.

Because of Envy's soul-destroying nature, because of its rebellion against God's leading in the lives of people, we see the end result of those who had Envy toward Daniel. After God had delivered Daniel from the lion's den, the very ones who desired to have him eliminated were themselves thrown into the lion's den, only without God's protection, and they, and their families, were quickly devoured.

Envy brings about the destruction of the individuals who practice and fall victim to its vicious calling. When we allow Envy to enter into our own lives, unless we see the error of our ways and call out to the Lord for forgiveness, we will suffer the very same fate.

Lloyd John Ogilvie says, "**One of the major causes of stress is combative competition – more accurately, Envy.** Rooted in a lack of self-esteem, it grows in the soul-soil of comparisons and blossoms in noxious thorns of desire for what others have or achieve."++

And that is very visible in the accounts of the Apostle Paul as he worked his way through Asia taking the Gospel message of Jesus Christ to the people. Listen to what happened to him in Thessalonica. This is Acts 17:1-8. (READ Acts 17:1-8)

The Jews were so filled with Envy at the effectiveness of the Gospel of Jesus Christ calling people into a relationship with God, and because Paul was the one sharing this Great Good News, they stirred up a riot in order to put Paul away. They were not interested in considering what Paul had to say about Jesus. They were only seeing Paul's popularity in drawing the crowds to him and away from them. So they fell prey to Envy and went after Paul.

Now, you have to understand that **Envy is wrapped up in the midst of our social life.** If we were isolated, with no one around us to compare ourselves with, there would be no Envy. But since we are social creatures, surrounded by people of a variety of different ethnic, economic, political, theological, religious and leadership differences, we all fall prey to Envy's alluring call. As we compare ourselves to one another, it is so hard to be comfortable where we are in the whole scale of life. We

always want more, and that craving, no matter how much we have, drives us to Envy the one who has a little bit more, or a little bit better, or a little bit newer, or a little bit fancier. So over the ages, the Christian saints have invited us to let go of the competitive posturing that is so prevalent in our world, and to compare ourselves only to God through Jesus Christ.

But that is nearly impossible in our world today. Simply turn on the TV and you are bombarded with commercials that tell you that you are a no-body unless you have this product, use that kind of hair color, eat that kind of food, root for that team, follow that guideline, wear that kind of clothes or shoes, and drive that kind of car. We are even belittled if we don't have the right kind of windows or those protective gutter-guards on our houses, causing us to Envy those who have it all together. And it goes on and on, starting at the very earliest of ages. You have to have this kind of toy, that kind of bicycle, eat this kind of snack, watch that kind of program or movie, have the most expensive kind of jewelry, have the most modern cell phone, and even have the right kind of boyfriend or girlfriend. The media today uses Envy to its benefit, showing us how bad we have it unless we have the biggest, the best, the fanciest, the most sophisticated, and the most updated – OF EVERYTHING! And it affects families, neighbors, communities, schools, businesses - every aspect of our lives. And the world sees this as a good thing because it drives people to bigger and better things! REALLY?

Oh, people, don't fall for the lie. Envy is nothing but a destroyer! Billy Graham describes the condition well by saying, "**Envy can ruin reputations, split churches, and cause murders.** Envy can shrink our circle of friends, ruin our business, and dwarf our souls...I have seen hundreds cursed by it."<sup>4</sup>

So many people are affected by Envy today, and it is dividing us and mutilating any form of social reform in our nation. When people see others as having something that they don't have, Envy causes them to do whatever it takes to make it happen for them. When we look at another and see the blessings that they have received from the Lord God, we tend to ask very quickly, "Why can't I have that, too?" No matter that the person may have worked hard and saved methodically most of their life in

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<sup>4</sup> (Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, pg. 270-271) \* \*\* \*\*\* +++

order to get what they have, the other looks at what they don't have and Envy steps right up to move that person into action to make it their own, rather than do their own hard work and careful saving in order to get one, too. Envy has the mindset, "I want, what I want, when I want it, and I want it now. If someone else has it, then I'm going to get it, somehow, and some way. But I will have it, even if I have to get what they have."

We use the term pretty freely, "being green with Envy." This describes that the person is sick, often incurably, with the disease of Envy. When the Envy bug bites us, the cancerous poison spreads throughout our bodies, throughout our minds, invading the spirit to the point of disabling the person bitten by it. Every time we compare ourselves with another and find ourselves on the side lacking – something, anything – the infection spreads and it destroys civility, politeness, courtesy, graciousness, and even life itself. And then we begin to rejoice in the misfortunes of others, and we are led to begin to instigate the demise of the ones who do well, the defamation of those in leadership above us, and the denouncement of the ones who have more.

**Envy seems to be at the heart of much of what we do.** It is focused on keeping score. It is preoccupied with justice, and many times it is bent upon destroying the happiness of others. Envy fuels those who would make everything equal for everyone, regardless of the gifts and graces given by God to each one of us, regardless of the dedication and hard work of many, and despite the fact that even when everyone is exactly the same, there would still be differences that would create some form of injustice. Envy never ends once it gets started. It is always "What's in it for me."

So, since Envy is so entrenched in our society today, what can we do to keep it from dominating our own souls? What can we do to remedy ourselves from this sickness called Envy?

Paul states it well in his book to the Romans. He tells them (and us), "*Love must be completely sincere. Hate what is evil, hold on to what is good. Love one another warmly as Christian brothers (and sisters), and be eager to show respect for one another. Work hard and do not be lazy. Serve the Lord with a heart full of devotion. Let your hope keep you joyful, be patient in your troubles, and pray*

*at all times. Share your belongings with your needy fellow Christians, and open your homes to strangers. Ask God to bless those who persecute you – yes, ask Him to bless, not to curse. Be happy with those who are happy, weep with those who weep. Have the same concern for everyone. Do not be proud, but accept humble duties. Do not think of yourselves as wise” (12:9-16).*

Did you catch it? **Love is what overcomes Envy.** When we have love for one another, we rejoice with them when they receive that promotion, when they purchase that new house, when they succeed at business. Love gets our eyes off of ourselves, and gets it set upon the other, not to judge them on what they have and you not have, but on how you might serve them, and encourage them, and grow in faith with them. **Love looks beyond the differences between us and brings us together as once family in Jesus Christ,** each blessed to be a blessing to another whom God puts on our hearts.

Love is not about what you can get from the one who has more than you do, but is about what you can do with what the Lord God has given to you. Love is not about beating another at acquiring material possessions or positions of power or about being better than another. **Love is giving rather than getting.** Love is serving rather than being served. Love is what brings us hope, what gives us joy, and what provides us with peace. Love looks at the other and says, “How may I serve you.” And if we are all about serving one another, there is no need for Envy, because we will all have what we need and we can be at peace with each other.

**Love brings contentment and satisfaction with what we have been given.** Love reaches out to touch the ones who are in need out of our abundance. Love creates community where happiness abounds, and where we all seek after the Lord Jesus Christ. Love brings life and nurtures gladness.

So be in love with Jesus and He will help you to be in love with those around you, giving you His blessings to do His work in our world today. Focus on Jesus and the bug of Envy will have to depart. Let’s pray.

Father God, forgive us for comparing ourselves with one another in such a way as to Envy the other. Forgive us of being unhappy with what You have graciously supplied us with. Forgive us of our



discontentment, and provide for us love instead of Envy. Help us to seriously look at ourselves today to see all that we have is Yours, not ours, and it is to be used to help, and encourage, and build up one another as we walk together in this life. Give us the courage to confess our Envy of the life of another and to be content with You in our life. Give us eyes to see the needs around us so that we might become Your servants, using all that we have to lift up and foster greater faith in those around us. Thank You for the example of Jesus, that we might seek to follow Him in all our ways each and every day of our life. This we pray in Jesus' precious and holy Name. AMEN.