

What's wrong with me? Envy

Message for Sunday, October 22, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 20:1-16 and more

Children's Message: from 1 Corinthians 12:14-21, where the parts of the body compare themselves to the others.

Give pictures of body parts to the children. Invite each one to tell why they are valuable to the body. They might even boast how they are the *most* important of all.

Paul writes about how silly that kind of talk is. All are important, from the smallest to the biggest. And so are we. Instead of comparing ourselves to other people, be glad to be the people God created us to be. We'll sing a great song to go with this: "If I Were a Butterfly." A line in the chorus is, "I just thank you, Father, for making me me."

Message: "What's wrong with me? Envy"

We're looking at the list of the Seven Deadly Sins. They are a tool we can use to examine our lives, diagnose our problems, and find help in overcoming those problems. Today's sin is envy.

1) Envy: the miserable sin

Envy is the desire for what someone else has: their status, their wealth, their job, their spouse, their looks, their home—anything they have, and you want it. You may already have all that you need, but that's unimportant. Someone else has more or better, and you want that. And if you can't have it, you wish theirs would disappear.

Envy is unique among the Seven Deadly Sins:

- a) It's the only one also in the Ten Commandments: the final commandment is "You shall not covet." Envy is the attitude; covet is the verb that goes with it.
- b) It's the only one on the list with no pleasure in it. All of the other sins can be enjoyed for a moment. Pride makes us feel good about ourselves, at least for a little while. Gluttony: pigging out on ice cream is fun... at the time. Greed: the vision of having it all, enjoying the good things of life, ah that's nice. Sloth: how nice to sleep in, instead of getting up and

working. Anger: oh yeah, that feels good! Lust: well, that's pretty obvious.

Envy is different from all the others: there is no fun in it. What pleasure is there in obsessing over the fact that someone else has what you want?

Envy only makes you miserable—because no matter how much you have, achieve, or enjoy, you can't be happy because there's always someone else who has more, achieves more, or enjoys more.

Read Matthew 20:1-16, Jesus' parable of the workers in the vineyard.

2) How envy ruins our lives

In that story that Jesus told, we see three negative things which happen when envy rears its ugly head.

a) Envy robs me of happiness

Imagine you are one of the workers hired early in the morning. You have been working in the sun all day. You've done a good job, and you're looking forward to getting paid and going home. It's been a good day.

You get lined up, and the owner of the vineyard starts paying the workers, beginning with those who started last. To your amazement, he pays the ones who worked just one hour a full day's wage. What would you be thinking? "I hit the jackpot!! If he's going to pay them that much for one hour, I'm going to get ten day's worth! This is fantastic!" But when you see that everyone is getting paid the same, envy swoops in and your joy turns sour. You're getting exactly the same amount that, a few minutes earlier, you would have been happy with. But now you're miserable.

That's what envy does. It makes you feel sorry for yourself, and it turns what could have been joy into misery.

Proverbs 14:30, New International Version:

**A heart at peace gives life to the body,
but envy rots the bones.**

b) Envy causes conflict in my life

Envy creates conflict between me and the person that I envy. Someone has a nicer home, and I resent that. A co-worker gets promoted, even though I am more qualified.

In the parable that Jesus told, the ones who worked all day are envious of the ones who worked only an hour. They are mad at the boss, and they are mad at the others for getting off so easy. I can imagine the talk among them as they walked back to town; it would not have been a pleasant conversation.

Even Jesus' disciples were envious of each other, and that envy turned friends into adversaries. They argued about which of them was Jesus' favourite [see Mark 9:34; Luke 22:24].

James 4:1-2, New International Version:
 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight.

I hope it doesn't get that bad with us. Better to not let envy get a foothold in the first place.

c) Envy leads to other sins

Envy leads to other sins. In fact, all of these seven deadly sins do that.

Look at stories from the Bible in which envy led to greater evil:

- J Cain was envious of his brother Abel, and murdered him.
- J Jacob was envious of his brother Esau, and stole his birthright.
- J Joseph's brothers were envious of Joseph, and they sold him into slavery.
- J King Saul was envious of the boy, David, and devoted years of his life trying to kill him.

James 3:16, New International Version:
 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

Envy keeps you from experiencing God's best for your life.

You'd think that with all this negative baggage, and no pleasure, that envy would be the easiest sin to avoid. But it's not. That's because the temptation for envy is everywhere around us. In fact, envy is the driving force behind our economy. It's behind every advertisement that you see. Envy is the primary reason why we run up so much credit card debt. It's why we buy the big screen TV that we

can't afford, why we buy a vehicle that is out of our budget.

3) Escaping the envy trap

a) Stop comparing myself to others

Envy and pride are relatives of each other. Both find their root in the same thing: comparing yourself to others. Whenever we compare ourselves to others, nothing good will come out of it.

Galatians 6:4, New Living Translation:
 Be sure to do what you should, for then you will enjoy personal satisfaction of having done your work well. Then you won't need to compare yourself to anyone else.

Take a moment right now and turn to the person sitting next to you and say, "Stop comparing yourself to me." This week, when you catch yourself comparing yourself to someone, hit the pause button in your life and pray this short prayer: "God, I thank you for making me me."

b) Start being thankful for who I am and what I have

Colossians 3:15, New Living Translation:
 And let the peace that comes from Christ rule in your hearts. For as members of one body you are all called to live in peace. And always be thankful.

I emphasize the two words "peace" and "thankful." When we are thankful, when we acknowledge how God has blessed us, when we count the goodness that he has poured into our lives, then we have inner peace and contentment. This also brings peace in our relationships with others, for it wipes away envy and resentment.

4) Healthy Virtue: Contentment

Contentment is the attitude which says, "I'm satisfied with who I am, what I am, and what I have. I have all that I need."

The basis for that contentment comes, not from having lots of stuff, but from having a relationship with God. When you know that God created you special, that God loves you just the way you are, that there is no one on earth that God loves more than you, that there is absolutely nothing you can do which will make God love you more—or less—

when you have that kind of relationship with God, you don't have to envy anyone ever again.

Philippians 4:11-13, God's Word:

I've learned to be content in whatever situation I'm in. I know how to live in poverty or prosperity. No matter what the situation, I've learned the secret of how to live when I'm full or when I'm hungry, when I have too much or when I have too little. I can do everything through Christ who strengthens me.

When you are in this relationship with God, you aren't worried about how God is blessing others. You aren't worried about what other have and what you don't have. You are free from envy.

Next Steps:

-) Don't worry about others: how much they have, what they think of you, and so on.
-) Instead be thankful for who you are, how God made you special, and how God loves you.
-) Find contentment and peace with God.