

Messenger of Truth

"Holding forth the Word of Life" (Phil. 2:16)

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Envy

"Enjoy your own life without comparing it with that of another." – Marquis de Condorcet

"Do not speak of your happiness to a man less fortunate than yourself." – Plutarch

"Envy is the art of counting the other fellow's blessings instead of your own. – Harold Coffin

"The spirit of envy can destroy; it can never build." – Margaret Thatcher

"There is not a passion so strongly rooted in the human heart as envy." – Richard Brinsley Sheridan

Envy, envious, and envied are found some 36 times in Scripture. Although the word may not appear as frequently as others, it is certainly not because of a lack of danger. Envy is one of the ugliest and strongest emotions found in man.

Our modern definition says a great deal about this emotion: "painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage." (Webster)

The classic example is that Pilate knew that it was because of envy that the religious leaders had delivered Jesus to him (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10). Jesus had stolen the limelight from them. Our Lord revealed earlier in the sacred text that these leaders loved to be seen and receive the praise of men (Matt. 6).

It is tragic to say that this ugly emotion can sometimes be found even in the church. Scripture provides us with a clear example when Barnabas had made a generous donation having sold land and given the proceeds to the church (Acts 4:36-37). Ananias and Sapphira took note of what had transpired, and sought to do the same but lied about the transaction. Their deception cost them dearly as they lost their lives (Acts 5:1-10).

In his letter to the church at Corinth, Paul had addressed the church likening it to a human body (1 Cor. 12:12ff). There is an interesting passage that hearts of envy would have a hard time accepting. "And if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it; or if one member is honored, all the members rejoice with it" (1 Cor. 12:26). Envious hearts would struggle honoring a member.

In the Old Testament, we have the story of Haman and Mordecai. Haman was a wicked man who greatly envied the blessings of Mordecai. As you recall, his envy led to his own downfall as he was hanged on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai (Esther 7:10).

There is great wisdom in counting your own blessings. It is when we start drawing comparisons of our life with others, that envy rears its ugly head.