

SEVEN Deadly Sins - #7 ENVY

So this is the final week in our sermon series SEVEN where we've been looking at what are called *The Seven Deadly Sins*. So, one last time, here is the list. It's been around for 1500 years and is still basically unchallenged as the major sins Christians still struggle with today. PRIDE. LUST. GREED. ENVY. SLOTH (or Apathy). WRATH (ANGER) & GLUTTONY.

The final deadly sin we're going to look at today is the sin of ENVY. So let's begin with a definition. ***"ENVY is a feeling of discontent or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or luck."*** Alternative words for envy might include covetousness, resentment or bitterness.

As you all know, one of the 10 Commandments speaks about envy. Deuteronomy 5:21 (NLT). ***"You must not covet your neighbor's wife. You must not covet your neighbor's house or land, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else that belongs to your neighbor."***

Irish playwright and novelist Oscar Wilde once told a powerful story about envy or covetousness.

The devil was once crossing the Libyan Desert, and came upon a spot where a number of small fiends were tormenting a monk. The sainted man easily shook off their evil suggestions. The devil watched their failure, and then he stepped forward to give them a lesson. He whispered to the monk 'Your brother has just been made bishop of Alexandria. A scowl of malignant envy at once clouded the monk's serene face. The devil said to his workers 'this is how you do it.'

So let's restate the commandment another way. *"You must not envy your fellow workers promotion at work, or the new house your sister just bought, or the boat your neighbor has that is bigger than yours."*

Why is envy dealt with in the Ten Commandments? It's because ENVY is dangerous to the soul. We tend to fixate on it. We let it build into jealousy. We become ungrateful and instead of counting our blessings and thanking God for them, we count the blessings other people have and we become ungrateful and resentful.

Envy can be a very powerful emotion. Do you remember the story of Joseph in the Old Testament? He was his dad's favourite child and Jacob made no secret of that. He even had a special coat made for Joseph – a coat of many

colours. Joseph, being young, wore it proudly, which was like rubbing his favouritism in his brothers' faces. Eventually, his brothers become so envious of him that they planned to kill him, but eventually sold him into slavery.

Or how about King Saul. We just read part of his story. He is King of Israel. Powerful. Wealthy. But despite all that he is unhappy and anxious. Why? Because there was a man in his army who was a brilliant military leader and who was known as a person of integrity. His name was David. After a particular victory in battle people began to sing songs about David and his success. Saul could not handle David's popularity and the Bible tells us, envy filled his heart, and as he allowed that to happen jealousy, bitterness and resentment crept in until Saul tried to have David killed.

There's an old proverb that say this, "**A person who is green with envy will be ripe for trouble**". There are plenty of stories in the Bible, and in our own life experiences, to testify to the truth of that observation. And one of the Old Testament Proverbs reminds us (14:30), '**A peaceful heart leads to a healthy body; Jealousy is like cancer in the bones.**'

Now maybe you're not convinced yet that ENVY is such a big deal. Well here's what the New Testament says in James 3:14-16 (NIV):

"But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice."

I always love how the Bible calls it as it is. So did you get the line that says? "(ENVY) ***is... earthly, unspiritual, and demonic.***"

Let me suggest a couple of reasons for that. First, envy damages your relationships with other people because you see their personal achievements or possessions or relationships as a threat. In his envy, King Saul saw David's accomplishments as a threat. It made him look at David through eyes of mistrust. Envy hid the real situation which was David's absolute loyalty to Saul as the King God had chosen to rule over Israel. But envy made Saul paranoid. It made him see conspiracies and plots against him that simply weren't there. As a result he started to plan and to plot for David's downfall.

In the same way, envy can make us turn our family members, our friends, our neighbours, and our colleagues at work into our competition and until we

build up walls of mistrust and suspicion. Here's what Scripture is pretty clear about. Envy has a dangerous progression about it: If we don't confess our envy, it leads us into bitterness. That bitterness leads to jealousy, conflict and friction. Those then lead us into alienation. And that alienation can lead into violence. There is an old Jewish proverb that says this, "**Envy is like a disease – it consumes the soul.**" That was true in Saul's life. We must make sure it is not true in ours.

The second thing that envy does, it turns you into a hypocrite. Saul hatches a plan to control David by making him his son-in-law. His real intention was to arrange it so David would die on the battlefield and his daughter would be widowed. I mean who does that to their child. But envy makes us do things we otherwise would condemn. So although, in his envy, he despised David, here's what he did, this is the hypocrite part. First Samuel 18:22, "**Then Saul told his men to say to David, 'The king really likes you, and so do we. Why don't you accept the king's offer and become his son-in-law?'**" Envy caused Saul to honour David in public but plot his downfall in private. Envy is when we are publicly pleased with the honours someone is given but privately we hope they will lose their Midas touch and come crashing down. Another translation of Proverbs 14:30 says, "**A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones.**"

A third thing that envy does is that it causes you to keep your eyes not on God but on those you envy and judge to be "the competition". First Samuel (18:9) says this of Saul, "**And Saul eyed David from that day and forward**" In Hebrew the word "eyed" means "an unbroken action". In other words, Saul constantly kept an eye of suspicion on David. That's what envy does. It makes us suspicious, and untrusting. Again, as Proverbs 14:20 says, this time in the King James translation, "**A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.**"

Now here's the really ugly side of envy. If we indulge it, and feed it, it can become very destructive. 1 Samuel 18:10-11.

"The very next day a tormenting spirit from God overwhelmed Saul, and he began to rave in his house like a madman. David was playing the harp, as he did each day. But Saul had a spear in his hand, and he suddenly hurled it at David, intending to pin him to the wall. But David escaped him twice."

Now the Bible is full of a number of stories about the dangers of envy. Cain and Abel, Sarah and Hagar, Jacob and Esau, Rachael and Leah, Joseph and his brothers. Even the disciples of Jesus argued over which of them would be

the greatest in the coming Kingdom. And above all let's not forget the role that envy played in the crucifixion of Jesus. You heard me correctly. Envy crucified Jesus. Mark 15:9-10, **"Would you like me to release to you this 'King of the Jews'?" Pilate asked (the crowd). (For he realized by now that the leading priests had arrested Jesus out of envy.)"** You get the idea. Envy is one of the seven deadly sins for a very good reason.

Now as you know every deadly sin had a corresponding holy virtue attached to it, a counterbalance of sorts. According to that list the counterbalancing virtue to envy is kindness or love. First Corinthians 13:4 (NIV), **"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud."** Theologian Francis Schaeffer once said this: **"I am to love God enough to be contented: I am to love people enough not to envy."**

The best way to keep envy under control is to live out a Christ-like love to those around you. The best way to purge envy from our lives is to recognize that its root cause is self-centeredness. Let's pray:

Pastoral Prayer

Merciful God,

We confess before you that envy, jealousy, and even bitterness so easily fill our thoughts, dominate our actions and control our spirit. Forgive us. Mould our lives we pray with your love that is patient, kind and never envious.

We pray for a world that is not defined by "haves" and "have-nots", a world where each person is known as one of your children, a world where justice and fairness are pursued rigorously.

We pray for a tense and frightened world. We remember recent terror attacks in Belgium, France, England, and Kabul.

We remember the tragic loss of lives in the forest fire in Portugal and the high rise fire in London.

We pray for healing for the injured, comfort for those who lost loved ones, and peace for the members of the emergency services.

We pray for those who are struggling in life, and especially for those who are battling anxiety, fear, and depression. We pray for strength for the dying, justice for the oppressed, and wisdom for the confused.

Lord, hear these our prayers along with the unspoken prayers in our hearts. In Jesus name. Amen.