

Envy by Don Henderson

One of the biggest problems we face in the United States today is the problem of envy. 1 Corinthians 3:3 says where you find envy you will find strife, divisions and destruction. Does this describe our culture today? I would say that is a fair analysis.

But it is not politically correct to accuse anyone of envy, so strife and divisions continue unabated. Well, I plead guilty of not being very politically correct; so I will breach the subject of envy. Let's have a frank discussion.

I find that 1 Samuel 18: 1-14 might shed some light on envy. We can discover what envy is, how envy can affect us and how to escape from envy. A quick overview of the story reveals that Jonathan, King Saul's son loves David like a brother, the people elevate David over King Saul and Saul attempts to slay David.

What is envy? I would say that it has three parts.

First, comparison. King Saul compares what people are saying about David in comparison to David. Verse 7 says "Saul has slain his thousands and David has slain his ten thousands." This comparison made Saul jealous and angry (v8).

Next, desire. Verse 9, "Saul eyed David." Saul wanted the acclaim that David had earned.

Last, resentment. Verse 11, "Saul said, I will smite David." Saul's resentment grew to anger and hatred and finally to destruction.

Can you see envy at work in America today? Do some find it politically expedient to set one group against another? It is a strategy, and an evil one at that, to plant the seeds of resentment in the hearts of unsuspecting people.

And, once planted, what can envy do to us? Envy spreads like a cancer on the American people.

First, it robs people of their happiness. People become less content with what they have. They become unhappy if others appear happy. Discontentment plagues them like a disease. Is the goal of "income redistribution" message one of fairness like its proponents claim? I say it's not about fairness but envy.

Next, envy grows. Here is where envy becomes even more dangerous than a cancer. In verse 10 of 1 Samuel 18 we read that an evil spirit came upon Saul. This is more than a war to control our minds, but to capture our soul. In Romans 1: 18-32 I find a progression of unrighteousness of men. Notice in verse 29 that envy is listed among other ungodly mindsets. Verse 28 states it like this, "God gave them over to a reprobate mind." Read all the verses, 18-32. There are political leaders that not only support unrighteousness but will be pleased to promote unrighteousness. Are you willing to stand with them challenging the judgement of God?

Finally, envy hides. Very seldom will evil present itself “in your face.” No, evil is far too cunning. In fact evil will want to disguise itself as good. The very topic of racism is a favorite place for envy to hide.

How can society escape from envy? How can we escape from envy? Let’s learn from Jonathan. Rather than envy David, Jonathan loved David as a brother. Ask yourself, who had the most to lose if David becomes king? As Saul’s son he is next in line for the throne. But in verse 4 Jonathan gives the throne to David. How did he do this?

Jonathan understood the biblical meaning of love. 1 Corinthians 13:4 says “true love can’t envy.” Envy and love can’t occupy the same space. True love is the opposite of envy. Love that says “I can’t be happy unless you are happy.” The more you flourish the happier I get.

Jonathan acted out the sacrifice of Christ. He emptied himself for the benefit of another. He gave up an earthly throne to serve God’s anointed. Philippians 2: 7-8 says, “He made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.” Jesus is the ultimate Jonathan.

How can we apply this commentary to our lives? We can recognize the true freedom it provides. We can throw off the throne of our life, giving up self-control. Our burden is heavy. Jesus says his burden is light. If we do this then the reasons for envy disappear.

Verse 12 gives us a simple warning. Because of Saul’s actions the Lord departed from him. James 3: 16 says, “For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.” I’m afraid there are a lot of Saul’s out there masquerading as Jonathans. Has the Lord departed from them? Only God knows a person’s heart, but I sure would be careful not to line up with them.