

Wings

*“Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength;
they shall mount up with wings like eagles.”
Isaiah 40:31*



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Love Does Not Envy

The desire to see others robbed of their good fortune is a universal human weakness, a destructive evil that can only be overcome by learning how to love.

“Love does not envy” (1 Cor. 13:4).

There are many sins described in the Bible, but none are as pervasive as the sin of envy. Barren Rachel envied Leah for her many children (Gen. 30:1). The envy that Joseph’s brothers felt toward him became an intense hatred that led them to sell him into bondage (Gen. 37:4, 11). It was envy that drove King Saul to persecute David, despite all the good the young man had done for him (1 Sam. 18:7-9). Envy played a role in the crucifixion of Christ (Matt. 27:18), and in the persecution against the early Christians (Ac. 17:5). Even among the Christians themselves, envy stirred up strife and division among the very people who should have been beacons of peace and harmony (1 Cor. 3:3).

The common irony in all these Biblical examples is that the perpetrators were not wicked people. For the most part they were all people of faith whose lives otherwise displayed many fine qualities. But those qualities were overshadowed by a consuming passion of hostility against the good fortunes of others around them.

The key to understanding envy is to recognize that it always involves an unfavorable comparison of ourselves with others. The high school teen envies the peer who has a cute boyfriend/girlfriend; the lowly factory worker envies the executive who lives in a posh neighborhood and drives a fine automobile. The divorced single mom envies the neighbor whose husband comes home every evening—sometimes with flowers. Given the infinite variety of experiences among the human race, the opportunities for envy are endless. But whatever the details, the root cause is always the same: We compare our circumstances with the good fortunes of others, and wish somehow that if we cannot attain what they have, at least they should be brought down to our level. It is that perverse desire to see others robbed of their happiness that makes envy such a sinister evil.

Therein lies the real danger in envy. In its early stages envy is a quiet discomfort at the blessings enjoyed by others. But in time it can grow into a seething bitterness that manifests itself

in hateful words and behaviors. Left unchecked, envy can turn the sweetest person into a cold, calculating monster.

Envy is a sin, and like all sins, we must take firm measures against it. But of all sins, envy is perhaps the most difficult to deal with. The English essayist Samuel Johnson described envy as “a stubborn weed of the mind,” a persistent evil that reappears again and again, despite our best efforts to eradicate it.

That brings us back to Paul’s description of envy as the antithesis of love. If I struggle with feelings of envy toward my neighbor, then it means I am not honoring the divine command to love my neighbor (Matt. 22:39; Rom. 13:8). The only way to successfully purge envy from my heart is to work actively to replace it with love. So when others experience good fortune, do not nurse spiteful feelings toward them; instead, sincerely and genuinely thank God for the blessings they have received. If we love them, we wish the best for them; so when it happens, we share their joy. A heart that thinks like that will have no room for envy.

– David King