

From Envy to Contentment

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Preacher: Paul Barker

[0 : 00] This is the evening service at Holy Trinity on the 13th of February 2005. The preacher is Paul Barker.

His sermon is entitled From Envy to Contentment and is based on Galatians 5, verses 16-26.

Well, what do I see tonight as I look out over this congregation? Sixty or seventy people?

Do I see humble people whose pride has been banished to the bin? Do I see patient people whose anger has been lost into thin air?

Is that the case? See, this series of seven deadly sins is about changing our character under the power of God. It's about the eradication of sin in our daily life and its replacement by virtue.

[1 : 08] It's about the appropriation of God's power, the power of the cross of Christ to live righteous lives now. Not just the power to forgive, but the power to change.

It's about dying to sin and about rising to live righteously. It's about putting to death the old self and putting on Christ.

It's about discarding the clothes of sin and it's about putting on the clothes of godliness. It's about the powerful word of God piercing to our very heart, being written there by the powerful spirit of God, changing us from within.

It's about using the slogan I used two weeks ago, the godly eye for the sinning guy. So in the last two weeks, how have you changed?

Because to be honest, we could come together for our Sunday evening services, enjoy the fellowship, perhaps the music, endure the sermon, let it go in one ear out the other, go home unchanged, come back the next week and repeat it all over and over again.

[2 : 27] What impact has God's word had on you so far? What situations have you been in where you've been tempted to pride but shunned the temptation and been godly humble?

Where have you been that you've been tempted to be angry in the last week, a cutty-sack incident for those here last week, but shunned the temptation and been patient?

What pride of yours has perished in the last fortnight? What anger have you abandoned this last week? What have you done to appropriate the power of the cross of Christ?

What have you done to appropriate the power of God's word? What have you done to appropriate the power of God's spirit in your lives, in your hearts, in your minds, in your souls this last fortnight?

For if nothing, why are you here? Let's pray. O God, our Heavenly Father, help us not only to be hearers of your word, but doers also.

[3 : 52] And we know that our sinful, rotten hearts need your powerful cross, your powerful word, and your powerful spirit to restore and renew us, to reshape us and transform us into the godly likeness of Jesus Christ.

So this tonight is our earnest prayer, that we be no longer proud, but humble, no longer angry, but patient, no longer full of envy, but rather contented in you.

Amen. You may have seen a little article in The Age this week, headed, Why the Seven Deadly Sins Have Been Knocked for Six.

I don't know that I've ever preached a more relevant sermon series. Last week there was an article about anger management in The Age that was relevant for our sermon. Here's another one. I'll be scouring The Age this week to see what it has to say about next week's topic.

But in this survey that was done in Britain about the seven deadly sins, you may be interested to find out that now the top sin on the list is cruelty.

[5 : 07] Cruelty is considered the worst sin anyone can commit nowadays. Followed by adultery. I must say that surprised me at number two, given the leadership of the English nation by its future king.

Bigotry, dishonesty, hypocrisy, and selfishness. And you'll be pleased to know that the seven deadly sins have been pruned to six, and if you live long enough there may not be any left.

Nine percent of people, according to this survey, said they had never committed any of the seven deadly sins. Liars.

And the survey found that of the seven deadly sins, people actually enjoyed five of them. They didn't particularly enjoy anger, and tonight's sin envy the same.

It's not the most enjoyable of sins. Tonight, we're dealing with one of the seven deadly sins, as they're traditionally called, envy. Oh, beware, my lord of envy.

[6 : 15] It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock the meat it feeds on. So wrote Shakespeare in Othello. The colour of envy is green.

We are green with envy. It's a green-eyed monster that lives within our hearts. How fertile the colour of green is, full of growth and life and vigour.

For envy grows luxuriantly green when we live east of Eden, in the land of Nod, to which the people were expelled from the Garden of Eden, and beyond Cain expelled further east, to the land of Nod in the book of Genesis.

Now, envy is not simply greed or covetousness. We'll deal with that next month. That's a separate sin. It's similar, but it's different.

Envy is more evil, in fact. More insidious. More destructive than greed or covetousness. You see, greed wants what someone else has.

[7 : 24] You've got that. I want one too, so I go out and get it. Envy's worse. You've got something I want. Envy's not satisfied when I go and get the same from somewhere else.

Envy is satisfied when I take what you've got and I have it for myself, so that you don't have it, but I might. But envy actually goes another step as well. Because if you've got something that I don't have that I want, I may well be satisfied in my envy by destroying what you have, even if I don't get it myself.

That's the evil, destructive nature of envy. And we're all guilty of harboring in our lives such a green-eyed monster.

Envy seeks to take, even if it doesn't get. It seeks to destroy, not to preserve. You think about it.

The girl who kills her former boyfriend, just so, I know it doesn't happen quite every day, but periodically these sorts of things happen, and you can think of other sorts of relational triangles in which this applies.

[8 : 37] The girl who kills her former boyfriend, so that another woman won't enjoy him. That's envy. Not just trying to get him back, but trying to make sure no one else can have him if I can't as well.

It's Saddam Hussein destroying the oil wells of Kuwait when he was defeated and beating a retreat back into Iraq in 1991. If I can't have those oil wells, no one else will get them either.

And so he set them all alight. For those of you old enough to remember. It's the child breaking his brother or sister's toy because he wants the toy, but though he can't get it, he's prepared to destroy it so that at least his brother and sister doesn't have something that he doesn't have and wants.

Or it's the model, the glamorous model, who scars someone else's face or clothes or whatever it is so that that other person is less beautiful.

She's got better beauty than I do. Let's get rid of it. Let's harm it, mar it, scar it, spoil it. It's Cain killing Abel because of the favour of God that was entrusted to Abel.

[9 : 49] If Cain can't have it, well I'm blown if my brother Abel is going to enjoy the favour of God. That's envy. Envy seeks to destroy, to take.

If I can't have, then nor can anyone else. And though in a sense I've used slightly extreme examples, it's true also in the more mundane, more matter-of-fact, more daily life type situations as well.

Last week I made comment, and we'll see this week by week in effect, that sin is intertwined. So where there is pride, there is often envy. Where there's envy, there is pride.

Where there's pride, there is anger. Where there's anger, there is pride and envy. And they're all mixed up together. They're slightly different manifestations of each other. Last week we saw Cain killing Abel was a manifestation of anger, but it's anger that is a manifestation of envy.

And envy is often a manifestation of pride. They're all intertwined, though they're subtly different from each other, because they all come from the same sinful heart. They all come from usurping God's throne.

[10 : 56] They all come from wanting to put me on the throne, not God. And if you try to put yourself on the throne, which is in effect the essence of sin, the deposing of God, then pride, anger, envy, and all the others flow freely from the heart of such a person.

If I'm on the throne, I will brook no rivals. And so if I'm on the throne of being the fastest athlete, but full of envy, consumed by envy, then I want to do something that will stop someone else getting on the faster throne, the bigger throne, the better throne.

And that's what envy is all about. You see, envy is mirror, mirror on the wall. Who's the fairest of them all? Envy is the going out to destroy Snow White, because she is more beautiful than the wicked witch or the queen or whoever it was in that fairy story.

Envy is a fast person, envious of a faster person. Envy is an A student, hating the A plus student. Envy is a good person, despising the better person.

Envy seeks to be above all others. It wants to be tops. It doesn't like challenges, because you're putting yourself on the throne at the heart of sin.

[12 : 15] And so you can't stand somebody else on a better throne that receives more acclaim or more applause. It's out of envy that they crucified Jesus.

We're told explicitly in Mark 15, for example. Envy puts down pretenders to your throne. So challenged by Jesus and his godliness, they put him to death.

That's envy. You see, envy does not rejoice in other people's fortune. And this is where we get down to the daily, in a sense, emotion or response of envy.

It's not just the killing of the boyfriend or the marring of someone's face, those dramatic acts, though periodically it comes that way. Envy does not rejoice in another's blessing or success or triumph.

You think about it. Someone you know, maybe a good friend. They win the prize at school and you say, well done, but you say it through gritted teeth because you're resenting them for something that you aspired to yourself.

- [13 : 31] Or somebody does, you know, performs music really well. And you say, that was great tonight, but again, you're full of resentment because you think, I wish it was me that was getting the acclaim for doing it well.

That's envy. It refuses to rejoice in others' blessing or success or triumph or glory. Another person's success or blessing, whatever it is, is in fact a challenge to my throne.

And so we praise them but through gritted teeth full of resentment. Another person's good fortune, another person's success or triumph scuffs my pride.

I hope you can think of examples where it occurs. It happens to me. A great preacher comes into town and preaches and people say, what a wonderful preacher he is.

And in my sinful, envious heart, I wish it was me. How many green-eyed monsters are in the pews tonight?

- [14 : 48] For in our sinful souls lurks green envy in each one of us. In the areas where we are competent, we are most likely to be envious when somebody is more competent than us.

See, it doesn't bother me at all if somebody can kick a football a mile or run 100 metres in five seconds or something. I'm not at all envious about that. It is so far beyond my level of competence.

I have no sense of envy. But at the places where I think I do quite well, but somebody does better, then I know how easy it is for the green-eyed monster to rear its ugly head in me.

Sitting precariously atop my sinful throne, vainly trying to beat down others for my own glory. That's the sin of envy.

It's not love because love, we're told in the Scriptures, rejoices in others' blessings. As Paul said very clearly in that great statement of the nature of love in 1 Corinthians chapter 13.

- [15 : 59] Love is patient. We saw something of patience last week. Love is kind. Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. Love does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.

Love rejoices in good things. So when a good thing happens to someone else, it rejoices sincerely from the heart in it. And yet so often, when that good thing that happens to someone else is something that we want or we aspire to or challenges our own competence or ability, we do not really rejoice in the good or the truth.

That is happening for someone else. And so as we let envy fester in our hearts, we actually invert good and evil. So we actually rejoice in what is evil and despise what is good.

Now it's not often I quote 16th century Elizabethan poetry. You'll be pleased about that. This is the first time ever in 22 years of preaching that I can remember.

For those who like poetry. And next to him malicious envy rode upon a ravenous wolf and still did chore between his cankered teeth a venomous toad that all the poison ran about his jaw but inwardly he chewed his own more a neighbour's wealth that made him ever sad.

- [17 : 24] For death it was when any good he saw and wept that no cause of weeping more he had but when he heard of harm he waxed wondrous glad.

From a famous poem called The Fairy Queen by Spencer. What it's saying there is in effect summing up in much more eloquent terms than I will ever use.

That those who harbour envy find its poisoning coming back inside us. And so much so that when there is good out there we do not rejoice but when there is harm we are wondrous glad.

No wonder it's a deadly sin if it leads us down the path of the inversion of good and evil. This is something my friends we have to deal with in the areas of life in which we are envious.

It may not be that we pick up a gun and shoot our former boyfriend or girlfriend like a dramatic instance but harbouring envy in our hearts is just as destructive and hateful.

[18 : 37] As we've seen in fact in the last two weeks the book of Proverbs warns us against these sins. Do not envy the violent Proverbs 3.31 Envy makes the bones rot.

Could almost be what Spencer was saying in The Fairy Queen in effect with the poison of the toad of envy coming back inside ourselves. Do not let your heart envy sinners but always continue in fear of the Lord.

There's the contrast you see. Envy of sinners putting it down by replacing it with fear of the Lord. That is acknowledging that God is on the throne not me.

Do not envy the wicked Proverbs 24. Twice says Wrath is cruel anger overwhelming but who is able to stand before envy?

And Solomon writing Ecclesiastes wrote Then I saw that all toil and all skill in work come from one person's envy of another. This also is a vanity and chasing after wind.

[19 : 42] Envy you see drives us down the despairing road of toil to keep atop our throne of sin. And envy keeps bad company.

It is rarely isolated in our hearts. Already we've seen it's intertwined with pride and anger the two sins we've dealt with in previous weeks. But in Galatians in the reading we heard tonight from Galatians 5 verse 21 part of a longer list really from verse 19 onwards envy is associated with jealousy with quarrels with factions with anger with enmities and dissensions.

In Titus 3 it's associated with malice and hate. In Romans 1 it's associated with evil and covetousness and malice and murder and gossip. In 1 Timothy 6 it's associated with friction suspicion and malice.

In James 3 the catalogue including envy associates it with selfish ambition disorder and all kinds of wickedness. In Romans 13 envy is associated with debauchery and dissension.

In 2 Corinthians 12 envy is associated with quarreling factions anger and slander. It doesn't come alone this envy. This green eyed monster is a social being and it courts the company of all sorts of other sins.

[20 : 59] They come in a pack and they are devastating community sins that divide people divide relationships and that expose the absence of love.

Envy doesn't come alone. Caught the green eyed monster within let it live and you'll find you've opened your heart to a whole host of ugly deadly sins.

So how on earth do we tame this green eyed monster that rears its head so frequently in our lives? How do we tame envy in our hearts?

Well if you go to a psychologist or if you read the psychology books in the bookshop it'll tell you think good things about yourself. Feel good about yourself. That's the pop way of trying to deal with envy.

If you think good things about yourself you're not going to be envious of other people. What a lot of hogwash that is. What a lot of nonsense written by people probably trying to make a quick buck who don't actually understand what people are like at all.

[22 : 06] Those who say get rid of envy by gaining greater self-esteem then you won't be envious of other people. If you've got better personal security you won't be envious. Nonsense again.

It's the junk of psych books it'll do little good. The only way that envy is tamed the only way that envy is dealt with is at its heart and it's dealt with at the cross of Christ.

There and there alone is there power to eradicate envy. There is the solution that's where we must turn not inwardly to try and think good things of ourselves but outwardly to try and find a greater power and that power is only found in the cross of Jesus Christ where not only did Jesus die to forgive us so that we don't just keep going back to the cross saying here I am envious again please forgive me and we go away and let the green eyed monster rear its head.

But Jesus died exhibiting power to destroy sin in our lives day by day. Not that we're perfect now we won't be till heaven but that we're not unchanged by the power of cross now that we are forgiven and the powerful grace to forgive is the same powerful grace to change and transform us on the inside as the letters of the New Testament in particular keep repeating in different ways for us.

Jesus died not only to forgive us our envy he died to bring power to change our hearts that envy might die for on the cross Jesus Christ died for Abel and he died for Cain and he died to reconcile two brothers one who full of envy and anger killed the other.

[23 : 48] Reconciliation brought by the power of the cross but not just at the end of time although that would have had to happen for Cain and Abel of course but even now today tomorrow the next day when that green eyed monster rears its ugly head we pierce it with the sword of God's word about the cross for God is on the throne not me and not you and God gives us all that we need so that we need not be envious about anything.

The power of the cross is where we go for envy dies in the bloody wood of Calvary. Dying to envy we rise to contentment.

We rise to contentment. Content that God is on the throne not me. Content with the satisfying bread and water of life that Jesus came to give us.

Content with the secure promise of heavenly glory. Content with the heavenly crowns we'll receive but around the throne of the Lamb in heaven.

Content with solid joys and lasting treasures. Content with every good gift that God promises to lavish upon us by his grace. We deserve none of it.

[25 : 12] It is grace that undercuts our pride and undercuts our envy. That as we come to the cross of Christ we do so empty handed, able to achieve nothing, spiritually speaking, bankrupt spiritually.

And so that our pride and our envy is dissipated as we come to the cross and receive a full measure of the grace of God in that powerful blood that forgives and that powerful blood that cleanses in our hearts.

A blood that is appropriated to us as we read God's powerful word, that two-edged sword piercing to our heart. As we ask God's powerful spirit to write that word on our heart.

As we sit under the cross, God's throne on the cross and get ourselves off our own petty thrones so that envy dies in the blood of Jesus Christ.

Dying to envy we rise to contentment. Dying to self we rise to love. A love that rejoices in what is true and good and right.

[26 : 30] A love that sincerely rejoices when others are blessed, when others are successful, when others are acclaimed. a true rejoicing flowing from our heart with true love.

And a love that seeks genuinely others' welfare, others' joy, others' blessing, others' praise. The key to all of this is not to look within our hearts to find the answer to the seven deadly sins.

the key each week is to go to the cross of Christ, to powerful blood shed to set us free from sin, to give us power to live righteously, to go to a powerful word about that gospel of the cross, the Bible, and soak ourselves in it and under it, to go to a powerful spirit that is able to cleanse, renew, restore, from our heart.

If we live by the Spirit, we're to be led by the Spirit. As this passage in Galatians 5 ended, those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.

If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited competing against one another, envying one another. And that's how the chapter ends.

[28 : 09] Our sinful flesh is crucified in Christ. Not just did he die there for us on our behalf, but we died in him so that our sinful lives die and that envy dies in his powerful blood.

God. Let us pray. And I'll pray using the words of a hymn that direct us to the power of God.

Oh, for a heart to praise my God, a heart from sin set free, a heart that sprinkled with the blood so freely shed for me, a heart resigned, submissive, meek, my great redeemer's throne, where only Christ is heard to speak, where Jesus reigns alone, a humble, lowly, contrite heart, believing, true and clean, which neither life nor death can part from him who dwells within, a heart in every thought renewed, and full of love divine, perfect and right and pure and good, your life revealed in mine.

Your nature, gracious Lord, impart, come quickly from above, write your new name upon my heart, your new best name of love.

Amen. Amen.