

“THE BELIEVER’S CONTENTMENT”

Text: James 3:14-4:3

Subject: Overcoming the silent killer that produces discord.

Introduction

1. If godliness with contentment is great gain – then ungodliness without contentment is great loss!
2. If our joy is our strength, then healthy people must live free from all envy because envy steals our strength.
3. If unity is a God thing (and it is) then for sure Satan will do his best to divide and weaken relationships.

(The Question Is)

- ◆ What is the cause and cure of a discontented spirit?
- ◆ What are the root reasons behind a contentious attitude?
- ◆ What’s the real issue when a person gets angry because they do not get what they want?

(God has a clear answer)

I. The Revelation of Envy

Fact: Vine’s Expository Dictionary defines envy as: “the feeling of displeasure produced by witnessing or hearing of the advantage or prosperity of others.”

Fact: Webster’s Dictionary defines envy as: “the painful or resentful awareness of an advantage enjoyed by another joined with a desire to possess the same advantage.”

Question: What is envy?

Answer: Envy is the pain and distress you feel over someone else’s success!

(In Plain Vanilla)

- ◆ Envy cannot be grateful for what it has from God.
- ◆ Envy cannot rest in who it is in Christ Jesus.
- ◆ Envy cannot celebrate the successes of others.
- ◆ Envy cannot be secure from the snare of comparison and competition.
- ◆ Envy cannot admit its own jealousies and insecurities.
- ◆ Envy cannot be content because of disorder on the inside.

Question: Is **envy** really that destructive?

Answer: It must be since it is listed in Galatians 5:19-21:

“Now the works of the flesh are manifest; which are these: adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, **envy**, murder drunkenness, revelings...they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” (Galatians 5:19-21)

(Envy is not new at all)

1. Lucifer envied God and wanted His glory.
2. Cain envied Abel because Abel's sacrifice was acceptable to God and Cain's was not.
3. Rachel envied her sister when Leah bore children.
4. Sarah envied Hagar when Ishmael was born.
5. Miriam envied Zipporah because of the position Zipporah enjoyed as Moses' wife.
6. Hannah envied Peninnah because Peninnah had children and Hannah was barren.
7. Peninnah envied Hannah because Hannah was Elkanah's favorite wife.
8. Korah envied Moses and Aaron because Aaron had authority to be the high priest.
9. Lot's herdsmen envied Abram's herdsmen.
10. Ishmael envied his brother Isaac.
11. Isaac's son Esau envied his brother Jacob.
12. The sons of Jacob envied their brother Joseph.
13. Saul envied David and perceived David as a competitor.
14. Absalom envied David because David had the affection of the people.
15. Adonijah envied David (his father) because God chose his brother (Solomon) for the throne.
16. Cush envied David when David became king (and then launched a smear campaign to dethrone David).
17. The regional governors (under King Darius) envied Daniel because of Daniel's influence with the king. (They then connived a way to get Daniel thrown into the den of lions)
18. Joshua envied the two absentees back at camp because they prophesied like the other 68.
19. Religious leaders envied Jesus because they viewed Him as a competitor in their sphere.
20. Laborers envied their co-workers in the vineyard because the land-owner did not treat everyone the same.

II. The Root Cause of Envy

“But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual and demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.” (James 3:14-17)

What causes envy? James is clear:

#1. Envy is “Bitter”

“But if ye have bitter envying.” (V. 14)

- ◆ James reveals that envy is empowered by an embittered heart.
- ◆ Left unattended, a bitter heart will defile relationships.
- ◆ Bitterness resents the fact that God has given something to another instead of us.
- ◆ Envy caused Esau to become bitter towards his brother Jacob all because Jacob got the blessing that Esau deserved as the firstborn.

#2. Envy is “Self Seeking”

“And strife in your hearts.” (v.14)

- ◆ The word “strife” (ERITHIAN) means friction (or more accurately, selfish ambition)
- ◆ This means that envy is fuelled by a self-seeking heart.
- ◆ Envy and self-seeking are brother and sister (as envy in our hearts is a sign that we are filled with impure motives and unholy ambition).

#3. Envy is “Boastful”

“Glory not.” (v. 14)

- ◆ James tells us here that envy is rooted in pride (and leads to boasting).
- ◆ Envy in the heart is revealed when we want to advertise our own merits.
- ◆ This envy is present (yet possibly hidden) when we want others to think we are something special.

Question: What is the fruit of envy?

Answer: James (and God) are unmistakably clear:

“For where **envy** and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.”

(In Other Words)

- ◆ Strife is motivated by **envy!** (It occurs when envy is present.)
- ◆ Strive is the fruit of **envy** in the heart! (It means flesh is present!)

(Case in point)

1. In Genesis 13:7-8, Lot was amply provided for. (Yet...)
2. Lot envied Abram’s abundant blessings (pasture land for their livestock).
3. Lot’s attitude filtered down to his herdsmen and they contended for the best feeding grounds.

(In Other Words)

- ◆ **Envy** and **strife** go hand in hand.

Check out the following:

(See how strife and envy shadow each other)

#1. “Being filled with all unrighteousness, sexual immorality, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of **envy**, murder, **strife**.” (Romans 1:29)

#2. “Lest there be debates, **envyings**, wrath, **strifes**, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults.” (II Corinthians 12:19)

#3. “Let us walk properly, as in the day, not in revelry and drunkenness, not in lewdness and lust, not in **strife** and **envy**.” (Romans 13:13)

#4. “Some indeed preach Christ even from **envy** and **strife**.” (Philippians 1:15)

#5. “He is proud, knowing nothing, but is obsessed with disputes and arguments over words, from which come **envy**, **strife**, reveling, evil suspicions.” (I Timothy 6:4)

III. The Removal of Envy

“But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle at all times, willing to yield to others, full of mercy and good fruit, without partiality and hypocrisy.” (James 3:17)

Question: How is it possible to be content in God, live free from envy and campaign to advance others instead of self?

Question: How is it possible to avoid the snare of James 4:1-3?

“What causes conflict among you? Isn’t it evil desires within the heart? You want what you do not have – so you scheme and quarrel to take it away...you want only what will give you pleasure.”

(It’s Christians at war)

- ◆ James uses the vocabulary of war to express bad feeling among Christians.
- ◆ He speaks of the horror of strife, controversies, quarrels and animosities.
- ◆ He exposes the fact that Christians who fight among themselves are in reality at enmity with God.
- ◆ So much so that, “You do not have because you do not ask.” Or, the supply from God becomes blocked and our prayers rendered ineffective – all because of internal disorder.

In Plain Vanilla

- ◆ There is the outward symptom of bad relationships among believers – which in reality is an inner flawed relationship (or conflict) with God.

In Other Words

- ◆ People who are contentious on the outside (with people) reveal that they are at war on the inside of themselves (against God).

Question: So what is it that crucifies envy and strife (and creates contentment)?

Question: What are the root characteristics of true wisdom that give birth to a healthy spirit that has healthy relationships? (**Wisdom from above that is...**)

1. **“Pure”**

“Wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure.”

- ◆ The word “pure” (HAGNE) means: “Holy, pure, free from defilement and “without mixture.”
- ◆ It means to be set apart unto God and totally separated from any impurity.
- ◆ Compared to light, this wisdom dispels darkness, illumines everything but is not influenced by anything around it.

In Other Words

- ◆ The first quality of a healthy inner man is the one quality that provides the secure foundation for all others. “First of all pure” means:
- ◆ The first and most important ingredient of a spiritually healthy heart is integrity, wholeness, purity and cleanness of heart.

Fact: Moths that investigate burning candles singe their wings for life.

Fact: No clever arrangement of bad eggs ever made a good omelet.

Fact: My progress in God will go no further than my obedience takes me.

2. **“Peaceable”**

- ◆ The word “peaceable” (EIRENIKE) means: “To bind or weave together.”
- ◆ It means that a healthy person will seek to join together and weave people to one another.

In Other Words

- ◆ A wise and healthy person reconciles people and never sows discord.
- ◆ It never defiles other people by giving evil reports.
- ◆ A person operating under the wisdom of God refuses to whisper or slander (which discredits and damages someone else’s reputation.)
“A forward man sows strife and a whisperer separates close friends.”
(Prov. 16:18)

3. **“Gentle”**

- ◆ The word “gentle” (EPIEKES) means: “Courteous, considerate and patient.”
- ◆ It is the opposite of critical, censorship and harshness.
- ◆ This quality stands for justice – but stands with a gracious gentleness.

In Other Words

- ◆ A gentle person is someone who interacts with other people in a spirit of respect for human dignity.
- ◆ It refuses to act (or react) out of anger, frustration or retaliation. Remember:

Fact: No provocation ever justifies an unchristian response.

Fact: Blessed are the boiler-makers for they shall always be in hot water.

Fact: If you have a short fuse, you can be sure that someone will light it.

“We were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherishes her children.” (I Thess. 2:7)

4. **“Teachable”**

- ◆ The words “easy to be entreated” (EUPEITHES) mean: “Being willing to listen to reason and appeal, and willing to change” (flexible).
- ◆ The opposite of stubborn and rigid, this wisdom from God allows you to be open to suggestions and willing to accept admonition and correction.
- ◆ It is an inner condition of heart that welcomes dialogue, input and advice.

Fact: Instead of bending other people out of shape, bend a little yourself!

Fact: Only a fool knows everything!

“He that refuses instruction despises his own soul.” (Proverbs 15:32)

5. **“Merciful”**

- ◆ The word “merciful” (ELEOUS) means: “To offer compassion to those in distress” (with feelings of affection and kindness).
- ◆ The merciful person understands how much God has been merciful to them.

(In other words)

- ◆ How can we not pass on to others what God has passed on to us?
- ◆ Maintain justice? Yes, 1,000 times yes! But maintain in a spirit that communicates your love and care for that person.

“Blessed are the merciful for they shall receive mercy.” (Matthew 5:7)

6. **“Impartial”**

- ◆ The words “without partiality” (ADIAKRITOS) mean: “To show no favoritism or prejudice and to be unwavering and undivided in convictions.”
- ◆ It means to offer help to others without being influenced by their dress, position, title or rank.

(In Other Words)

- ◆ Wisdom from above (operating in you) will motivate you to serve for the benefit of the one you are serving.

Fact: Merchandizing is when I empty other people to enrich myself; ministry is when I empty myself to enrich other people.

“If you have respect to persons, you commit sin.” (James 2:9)

7. “**Transparent**”

- ◆ The words “without hypocrisy” (ANUPOKRITOS) mean: “To be free from playacting, insincerity and wearing a mask.”
- ◆ It means we never claim (or appear) to be one thing, yet live something else behind the scenes.
- ◆ Wisdom from above is genuine, sincere and never tries to fake people out.

(Remember this)

When there is any difference between my sincerest moment before men and what God knows to be the reality – to that degree I am a hypocrite, not transparent, insincere and not walking in fear of the Lord!!!

(Also remember)

Gossip is saying behind a person’s back what you would never say to their face; flattery is saying to a person’s face what you would never say behind their back!

- ◆ So let’s forget all the hype (which is energy without sincerity) and live transparent before God and one another!

“Now therefore fear the Lord, and serve Him in sincerity and in truth.” (Joshua 24:14)

(Lord, teach us all to...)

1. Learn the joy of living for an audience of One – Jesus.
2. Make it our life goal to please You (so that others cannot tempt us to compete or compare).
3. Refuse to be motivated by short term gains (like applause, recognition and awards) and live for long term gains (eternity).
4. Esteem and value Your approval more than any other approval on earth.
5. Aspire to be a servant so that carnal ambitions cannot motivate us and make us an easy target for envy.
6. Ask You to make us satisfied in You so that we will not desire what You give to another.
7. Understand that happiness is not getting what we want, but everyday giving our wants and expectations to You.

**“My soul wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from Him.”
(Psalm 62:5)**

AMEN!
Bill Kirk