

1 Corinthians 13 (4-7) pt.4 – Love Does Not Envy

In 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Paul uses 15 words to describe love in action, and these words are characteristic of the person and work of Christ. These aren't philosophical ideas about love, and they aren't describing a feeling. This is talking about something you do or don't do.

In this sermon series we are examining each of these 15 manifestations of love. And it is wonderful to see what the true beauty of biblical love looks like. However, understanding what love looks like should convict you of your sin, because this looks like Jesus, but it doesn't look like you. But the beauty of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has met the standard of love for you. And that should inspire you to become more like him as an ongoing act of worship with your life. You see Jesus, and his love for you, and then the Holy Spirit can and does empower you to love like Jesus does.

Love does not envy. What do you think of when you hear the word “envy”? You might think of jealousy, and you might think that envy and jealousy are basically the same thing. Well, envy and jealousy are related, but there is a distinction between the two. Envy is, “I wish I had what you have.” Jealousy is, “I worry you’ll take what I have.” Envy occurs when you lack something that is enjoyed by someone else. Jealousy occurs when something you already possess or something you really desire or something you think you deserve is threatened by a third person. And so, envy is most often a two-person situation whereas jealousy is a three-person (or more) situation. Envy is a reaction to lacking something. Jealousy is a reaction to the threat of losing something (or someone). Having said that, in this message I will use the words interchangeably.

When Paul mentions envy here in 1 Corinthians 13:4, remember that he is talking to a group of people who were having a hard time relating well to one another. In this church there was a lot of pride. There were factions and divisions stemming from differing social classes, preferences about certain teachers, and envy, jealousy, and disorder over the priority and use of spiritual gifts.

In 1 Corinthians 3:3, Paul challenges their spirituality, and says, “*For while there is jealousy and strife among you, are you not of the flesh and behaving only in a human way?*” Paul is saying that jealousy stifles your spiritual growth. He is saying that envious people are not mature people. He is saying that problems between people in the church are rooted in jealousy. He is saying that jealousy is the reason, and strife is the result.

In 1 Corinthians 4:7 Paul spoke to those who had pride about their gifts, as if these things made them better than others. He said, “*What do you have that you did not receive? If then you received it, why do you boast as if you did not receive it?*” In 1 Corinthians 12 he uses the human body as a metaphor, saying that just as every member of a body is necessary, so too, every member of Christ’s church and every spiritual gift is important and is given to build other people up, not to puff yourself up. So, no one should think they are too good, and no one should think they aren’t good enough in the body of Christ. Paul says you don’t need to compare, you need to cooperate.

In 1 Corinthians 12:31 Paul uses the same Greek word in a good sense when he says to *earnestly desire* spiritual gifts. Now it may be that 1 Corinthians 12:31 is an indicative not an imperative. If that is the case, then Paul is scolding them. You could translate it like this: You Corinthians are very zealous for the certain gifts, but I will show you a better way. I do think that fits the context

better, actually. But in any event, jealousy, or zeal, can be used in a positive or a negative sense. And Paul is pointing to the negative sense here in 1 Corinthians 13:4. In 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul says, “...*I feel a divine jealousy for you...to present you as a pure virgin to Christ.*” So, Paul isn’t saying that love has no envy at all, but that love doesn’t involve itself in the evil sort of envy.

This evil sort of envy in 1 Corinthians 13:4 goes further than simply wanting what someone else has. It is inclusive of not only envy, but jealousy, covetousness, or an angry zeal to stop someone else’s success, and other actions, desires, and thoughts like that. All of those things are related, and love does not behave or think in those ways. The opposite of love is hatred, and it is an envious hatred that burns because it thinks someone else has something that should be yours, or wants what someone else has, or wants someone else not to have the thing at all. Envious hatred is resenting a person for being blessed. But love rejoices when others are blessed. Love doesn’t focus on itself, it focuses on the needs of the one it loves. And love knows that God knows what’s best.

Envy reveals an idol. Most often it is the idol of self. There is an insecurity or a discontentment that says “God, you aren’t doing me right” in your heart. You might be envious of another person for their looks, their job, career, popularity, possessions, success, or someone’s marriage, family, children, spouse, or their financial or social status. Envy is an animosity toward someone because of their abilities, achievements, or accomplishments. You can be envious of the ease of others, their seemingly stress-free life, or their apparent lack of suffering. Envy hates it when they have to endure something while someone else is delivered from it. And envy isn’t limited to an individual. You can be envious of a whole group of people or type of career or any number of things. Some Christians are envious by thinking everyone has it better than me. And tragically some, or perhaps many Christians are envious of the wicked lifestyles of unbelievers.

People can be envious of opportunity, education, blessing, health, or happiness. Someone in the church, at work, or at school, can burn with bitter envy because someone else was admired, and they were not. They were not approached, not asked, not visited, not consulted, not included, not honored, feeling neglected. They wanted the affirmation, appreciation, recognition, and someone else got it. Or they wanted it for a loved one, and they didn’t get it. So now they hold the one who gave the blessing to someone else in contempt. Think about the story Jesus told (Matthew 20:1-16) where the man paid the workers the same amount, even though some had worked all day, and some only one hour. They grumbled at the man, and were angry about his generosity. They had been blessed by getting paid a fair wage for work. But envy had caused them to become bitter at the man who gave the blessings. How often are you like this with God?

Envy will hurt you. Proverbs 14:30 says that *envy makes the bones rot*. And envy can hurt others. A suspicious, paranoid jealousy has ruined many marriages. And other relationships. Envy hates it when others are preferred. And it will act out in evil ways. Because the story never ends with just jealousy. James 3:16 – *For where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there will be disorder and every vile practice*. Did you catch that? Wherever envy is, it will bring disorder and evil with it. You see, envy can be hidden, but it can’t stay hidden. It will eventually and always produce evil offspring. You cannot compartmentalize it. It will spread like a viral disease. It corrupts you and consumes you. Envy is a poison that makes you petty. Envy will steal your joy and hinder your happiness. Envy is a cancer that eats your contentment. Envy will destroy your inner peace. Envy is a fire that burns your soul. Envy will drain the power from your spiritual life.

Envy is a powerful, evil force. Listen to Proverbs 27:4 – *Wrath is cruel, anger is overwhelming, but who can stand before jealousy?* Think about that; jealousy is a stronger force than wrath or anger. Satan was envious of Adam and Eve, and he planted the seed of envy in their hearts for God. And that root sin spread like wildfire through humanity. Cain became jealous of his brother and murdered him (Genesis 4:3-8). Joseph's brothers became jealous of him and they sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:11, 28). Korah, Dathan, and Abiram stirred up the people to do evil because they were jealous of Moses (Numbers 16). King Saul sought to harm David because he was jealous (1 Samuel 18). And envy is why the religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus. *For he knew that they had handed Him over because of envy* (Matthew 27:18).

You might think of envy as some lesser sin on a sin scale, some offshoot, not a root sin. You might think that envy can't be as dangerous as adultery, or drunkenness, because people don't see it, and so it doesn't really hurt anyone. But if you think that way, when envy produces its offspring, with other, more overt sins, you'll try to cut off the sin that has flowered up out of it without attempting to remove the envious root. And even if you get some measure of control over the obvious sin, envy will continue to manifest in other ways. You see, envy is a root, creating all sorts of poison plants, that is why it is called the green monster, and you have to do war with it.

You might hear this and think no this isn't me, envy isn't my root problem. And then you will fail to grow because you fail to acknowledge this true diagnosis of how you are. Instead, be open to allow God's word to penetrate and search your heart out, revealing your root sin, and granting you the chance for meaningful change through real and deep repentance. You are transformed by the renewing of your mind, and this is a big part of that. Don't let this opportunity slip away.

It might be that a lot of the sin issues that your trying to overcome, and with all the different ways that it's making you struggle, it all comes down to this one root cause. Maybe your obvious sin keeps popping up, and even when you keep it down for a while, something else pops up. And maybe it's all because you haven't really dealt with the real issue. Don't dismiss yourself from this just because you don't think you have it. Envy takes many forms. Many people don't realize the depth of this root, they don't realize that they are envious or jealous. So, don't ignore this once you realize you do have it. If you feel the conviction, it's time for confession. Don't cover it up, bring it to God. If you try to hide it God will bring it out into the open, but if you bring it out into the open God will hide it. You need spiritual surgery. Let the Great Physician, Jesus Christ, work on your heart. And it's going to hurt, but remember, if repentance doesn't hurt it doesn't heal.

So, you've heard the description of envy. You've heard about the destructive power of envy. Now, once you've been diagnosed with envy, how can you be delivered from envy? I'll give you three ways to combat envy. We'll call them repent, replace, and rejoice.

Repent of your envy. We've been covering that already. But you'll need to keep at it. Stop playing the comparison game. People all over the world are in a vain pursuit of what they think life is all about. But Luke 12:15 warns you, "*Take care, and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions*". You can define possessions very broadly to include any sort of pedigree, popularity, power, prestige, prosperity, or comfort. Are you taking care and being on your guard against all covetousness? What are you actually pursuing in life? Are you actually praying to God and asking him to reveal any envy, jealousy, or

covetousness in you? As you have listened to this message, has it resonated with you? How much of your life is spent on the incessant demands to attain or maintain your desired lifestyle? Do you have any idea how much good you cannot do to others because of this? When you think of all that we've said already, and then think about how much of your life is spent on yourself, then you'll know how to repent. And then you can replace envy with love.

Replace your envy. You can't just get rid of envy, you have to replace it with new affections. You have to change your pursuits. You have to convince yourself that the essence of life is not in your pedigree, popularity, possessions, power, prestige, prosperity, or anything else that will pass away with this life. The essence of life is found in Jesus and the mission he has given you. God provides gifts for you to enjoy, but also to employ in the mission he calls you to (1 Timothy 6:17-19). But if you look to those gifts for life's essence, you will find them a hollow shell. And you'll keep trying to fill your life up with hollow things because they are only the shell, not the essence. Think of it this way: No one in heaven envies the rich or powerful of this world. No one covets the celebrity of the famous. They are fully consumed by the true essence of life: Jesus Christ.

When your heart is fixed upon the fleeting pleasures of this world, it interferes with your love for God and others. But when your heart is crucified to this world, then your affections have been placed upon God and others. Then you will live in love and you will no longer live in envy, jealousy, covetousness and hatred. Again, remember that envy isn't limited to being envious of someone else. It means an envious mindset about your situation compared to what you think you deserve. Someone who lives in envy doesn't love God as much as they love themselves. But someone who lives in love has discovered that true happiness does not exist in things, or titles, achievements, or fame, recognition, or riches. Living in love means no longer seeking satisfaction or contentment in things, because those things aren't the true source.

You will never be truly content unless you're free from envy. And you'll never be free from envy until your love rises higher than yourself. And your love will never rise higher than yourself until your heart is crucified to this world (Galatians 6:14). If you want to be free from envy, you have to repent of how your envy keeps you from loving God and loving others as you could and should. Then you have to replace your envious desires and pursuits with things such as thanksgiving. 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 says, "*Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.*" No matter what it feels like right now, you can rejoice that in Christ you are wanted, and you are winning.

Rejoice in the blessings of others. Ask God to bless others, and thank God when he blesses people, especially if it's someone you envy. Instead of criticizing or complaining about the gifts of others, you can use your words to build people up when they exercise their gifts. If you really want to invite the blessing of God, then spend your blessings on others. Become a channel of God's blessing, instead of a dead end. Rejoice in the abilities, achievements, blessings, and success of others, even when they "don't deserve it." Because thank God his grace gives you blessings you don't deserve, and his mercy keeps you from the punishment you do deserve. Love knows that God doesn't owe any of us a blessing. We don't deserve God's favor, yet he has blessed us with all spiritual blessings in Jesus Christ. And when you look at Jesus you see his total lack of envy. He said he did not come to seek his own glory, but the glory of his Father. He said that he did not come to be served, but to serve, and give his life. Love does not envy, love looks to Jesus.