

The Deadly Sin Of Envy

Luke 9:49-50

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Envy is the feeling of displeasure, unhappiness, and even anger that arises within us when we hear of or see some gift, some advantage, some accomplishment, or some grace gained or exercised by others. **Envy** desires that others be deprived of what they have. Why? Because others have it, and I don't have it. From envy within us is stirred up discontentment, strife, rivalry, self-pity, and even rage at times, which then leads to wars, violence, and murder.

How many times do you at work eye the promotion of others, or in your family look at the abilities of your siblings or parents, or hear certain news that someone you know has married, or observe the gift of one who speaks so well before others, and feel unhappy because they have what you want and do not have? That is the sin of envy at work in your life and mine.

Dear ones, envy flows from our pride in thinking that we are superior to others or more deserving than others, of whatever it is that we envy. **Envy** is a species of covetousness in craving what we do not have, but envy goes one step farther and is displeased and unhappy at the gifts, graces, successes, and prosperity of others, and will at times even speak or act against the one envied. **Envy** cannot stand to have even equals, but really desires to cut down others, so that those envied are beneath them—not beside them working together. How often is gossip, slander, misrepresentation of the views of others, or the humiliation of others motivated by envy? Envy is a deadly sin, dear ones, against which we must constantly be on watch, constantly crucify lest it consume us and we be divided against one another, despising the gifts and graces of one

another (rather than rejoicing in the gifts and graces of one another—gifts which we ourselves may not have).

One day, Christ's disciples became green with envy over the gifts and graces displayed by an unnamed Christian that they happened to see on a particular occasion. Let us consider that occasion from our text this Lord's Day. The main points for today's sermon are the following: (1) Envy Revealed In The Disciples (Luke 9:49); and (2) Envy Reproved By The Lord (Luke 9:50).

I. Envy Revealed In The Disciples (Luke 9:49).

A. Let us briefly review the context leading up to our text. The Lord (in the previous verses in Luke 9) had set a small child (perhaps a toddler) in their midst and had corrected His disciples for their pride, stating that those who would be truly great in Christ's kingdom must become small in their own eyes like this little child. They must lower themselves, rather than exalt themselves. They must become servants in order to become leaders. They must be willing to serve (for Christ's sake) even the smallest, youngest, and lowliest of Christ's followers. Christ stated that in serving others (even the lowliest among them), His disciples would be serving Him (Luke 9:48).

1. Dear ones, how this truth will transform our service in the church and in the home (if we practice it every day by God's grace), for we will see that no service to others is unimportant or insignificant in the kingdom of Christ—even the most menial service for others may be a work done for Christ. What is the job that you consider to be so low that you must force yourself to do it? It is a service to Christ and to others. Let the love of Christ for you and your love for Him transform your work into a blessed sacrifice of love you offer to Him.

2. Dear ones, we must in our lives, families, workplaces,

schools, and church, cease from following the example of the disciples of Christ as they argued who was the greatest and what they thought they deserved, and rather daily deny ourselves, take up cross to crucify the pride in our lives, and follow our Savior, who lowered Himself and made Himself of no reputation, and took upon Himself the form of a servant, enduring the curse and shame of the cross in order to redeem us from the curse of God's everlasting judgment which we deserved. It is the cross of Christ that melts our pride, dear ones.

B. Having been soundly (yet gently) rebuked by the Lord for their vain pride in exalting themselves above one another, John now speaks up in Luke 9:49 (read it). It is evident that John's statement is a direct response to the loving rebuke they had just received from the Lord, for the text says that John "answered" the Lord. Having heard from the Lord that they were to serve even the lowliest of Christ's disciples within Christ's kingdom (even a small child), John's mind is drawn to a recent situation in which the apostles had rebuked one for casting out demons in Christ's name. Perhaps in light of Christ's rebuke of their pride, John's conscience is now stirred, and he desires to know whether they served this man, or whether they served themselves in rebuking him.

C. What was this man doing whom the apostles rebuked? He was casting out demons in the name of Christ. The fact that the plural (demons) is used here, rather than the singular (demon), as well as the fact that the present tense for "casting out" is used (indicating that he was continuously doing so) would tend to indicate that this Christian had delivered more than one person from a demon (perhaps even many people).

D. When and where the apostles saw this man, we do not know. It would seem that this man had been recently been rebuked by the

apostles, since it was just now being brought to the attention of Christ. Having just recently endured the public humiliation of not having been able to cast out one demon due to their unbelief (Luke 9:37-43), perhaps it was just too much to come upon a man who was casting out demons in Christ's name, and to make things worse, he wasn't even one of the twelve apostles Christ had ordained to follow Him. So the apostles forbade this man from continuing to cast out demons in Christ's name.

E. What was the stated reason for prohibiting this man to cast out demons in Christ's name? "He followeth not us" (Luke 9:49). That is, he was not one of the twelve apostles, who had been particularly ordained by Christ to preach the kingdom of God and to perform miraculous signs in the name of Christ (Matthew 10:1).

1. The reason stated by the apostles for hindering him from casting out demons was not because he preached what was false or contrary to the doctrine of Christ. To the contrary, he was doing so in the name of Christ (which would seem in the context to indicate that he was doing so according to the will and purpose of Christ, because Christ approves of the man).

2. Christ did not disapprove of this man's doctrine, of his worship or of his life. Had there been some error in doctrine or life, the Lord Jesus would not have commended this man, but would have condemned this man as being a false teacher (just as He did with the Pharisees in Matthew 15:13-14).

3. I would submit that this man was not even forbidden to cast out demons because he did not have a calling from God to do so (perhaps he had been ordained by John the Baptist). We don't know how he was called by God to cast out demons in the name of Christ, but it would seem he had such a calling from God (for Christ did not disapprove of his call to cast out demons in His name, but rather tacitly approves of his call to do so).

4. The underlying sin that led the apostles to rebuke this gifted Christian man was that of envy—he was casting out demons in the name of Christ when he wasn't even one of the twelve ordained apostles. That was an honor deserving of the twelve apostles alone (so they thought). They envied that unique status, and without seeking the mind of the Lord first, they rashly rebuked this man. These gifts and graces (in the opinion of the apostles) could not be shared with any others (for they were the greatest in the kingdom of God).

F. In what ways did the apostles offend in forbidding this man to cast out demons in Christ's name?

1. **First, I would submit that they were rash** in forbidding the man before seeking the mind of Christ.

a. Dear ones, we will inevitably find ourselves in trouble when we presume to speak on behalf of Christ, before truly knowing the mind of Christ from a clear understanding of His revealed will in Scripture.

b. I submit, it is far better to say nothing (and to be silent) if we do not know the revealed will of Christ, than to speak rashly of that which we do not know. It is far safer to be more deliberate and slow, even if it means that a situation goes on of which we are unsure, than to be hasty and to condemn that of which we have no certainty from God's Word.

2. Second, the apostles offended in forbidding this man to cast out demons in Christ's name because **it revealed their envy and rivalry** in not rejoicing in the gifts and graces of other believers, but rather in condemning the gifts and graces of other believers. Had they not sinfully desired the preeminent positions in the kingdom of heaven, they would not have been threatened by the gifts of a man, who also promoted the kingdom of Christ through the truth and power of Christ (and who apparently was called by God to do so, even if he was not one

of the twelve apostles). As noted earlier, we should infer that since Christ did not condemn this man, the man was sound in his doctrine and practice, and was lawfully appointed to cast out demons by God.

G. What is the fruit of envy? It is the devilish fruit of rivalry, strife, confusion, division, and confusion (or tumults) within a family or with the church according to James 3:14-16. Where there is such fruit within a church or within a family, it may be ultimately traced back to envy within our hearts. We desire to be promoted or to be given due attention in the eyes of others. Dear ones, we can always justify in our own minds why we deserved to be advanced rather than someone else (that is the nature of our envy). Ministers and elders may envy the gifts and graces of one another, husbands and wives may envy the gifts and graces of one another, or members of the congregation may envy the gifts and graces of the elders and of one another.

1. Let me say something to us who serve as ministers and elders. If we would see the flock of Christ work together as a body, they must see their minister and elders working together. Ministers and elders like everyone else have different gifts and graces, but all to be used not to serve themselves (and not turn the spotlight upon themselves), but to serve Christ and the most lowly members. In fact, those ministers and elders, who are the most gifted, ought to be the greatest servants in the Church of Christ. Members, you may help here by not looking upon one minister or one elder as being the “greatest” (we do not need that temptation to pride), but rather looking upon us simply as Christ’s ministers and servants (1 Corinthians 3—I am of Paul—I am of Apollos). The gifts and graces of one minister or elder become the gifts and graces of the whole session, of the whole presbytery, and of the whole church (1 Corinthians 3:21-23).

2. To the members of the congregation, let me say that you may be tempted to envy the gifts and graces of others by desiring places

of recognition and leadership in which you can exalt yourselves in the eyes of others, or by envying (or coveting) the beautiful home, the recognized accomplishments, the academic degrees, the musical abilities, or even the spouse of another. Remember, dear ones, the envy of Absalom who desired the place of his father and stole away the hearts of Israel by criticizing the decisions of his father. Remember the envy of Joseph's brethren who did not rejoice in the gifts and graces of Joseph, which led them to seek his death (and to sell him into slavery). Envy is so insidious in filling our eyes and our hearts with selfish desires to have the gifts and graces of others, and not to be satisfied until we have done what we can do to see them deprived of those gifts and graces (by our words and deeds).

II. Envy Reproved By The Lord (Luke 9:50).

A. First, the Lord in no uncertain terms says, "Forbid him not." The emphasis indicated by the Greek construction of this prohibition is this: "Stop forbidding him", or "Discontinue forbidding him from casting out demons in my name." This would tend to indicate that the apostles had forbidden him on more than one occasion.

B. Why did the Lord command the apostles to stop forbidding this gifted Christian man? For two stated reasons.

1. The first reason is stated in Mark 9:39 (the parallel passage to the one here in Luke 9). One who was casting out demons in Christ's name and by Christ's authority would not be so likely to speak evil of Christ or of His doctrine. In fact, to cast out demons in Christ's NAME, implies in a proper sense to cast out demons in accordance with Christ's purpose and will (e.g. praying in Christ's name likewise implies praying according to the will of Christ, John 14:14 cp. John 15:7; 1 John 5:14).

a. But what about those who prophecy, cast out demons, and performs miraculous works in Christ's name (Matthew 7:22-23)? I suggest there is a proper sense (a conformity to the will and purpose of Christ) in which Christ's name is used (as was true of this gifted Christian man in Luke 9), but there is also an improper sense (a mere formality in which the name of Christ is used profanely (and not according to the will and purpose of Christ, like that of the Jewish exorcists in Acts 19:13-16)—just as we may use Christ's name in prayer in a proper sense or in an improper sense.

b. We must always remember that the Lord has given us tests in order to examine the claims of any who perform miracles in Christ's name: the test of doctrine and the test of godliness (Matthew 7:15-23; 1 John 4:1; Romans 16:17; Deuteronomy 13:1-3). Thus, we ought not to interpret this passage to teach some ecumenical union of professing ministers from various denominations that teach contrary to the biblical faith which we have received from the prophets, the apostles, and Christ in the Scriptures. This passage actually teaches that where there is a profession of sound doctrine, pure worship, faithful church government, owning of lawful covenants, and the fruits of godliness that are agreeable to Scripture, and who has been called by the Lord, we are bound to receive the ministry of such a one as lawfully discharged (and to seek unity with such a minister).

2. The second stated reason why the apostles were commanded to stop forbidding this man is given to us in Luke 9:50: "He that is not against us is for us." In other words, he who does not teach or practice **contrary** to what Christ and His apostles taught and practiced, is one who stands **for** what Christ and the apostles taught (Matthew 28:20). This is not addressing one who is opposed to faithful Terms of Communion, or one who is in a dreadful state of neutrality, indifference, or compromise to the truth of Christ.

C. Finally, what remedies might we use to overcome this spirit of envy in our own lives, families, and church?

1. First, realize the deadly seriousness of the sin of envy.

a. Consider the greatness of the sin of envy has led to murder or attempted murder, **as in the life of Cain** who killed Abel because Abel's sacrifice was accepted by the Lord, but his was not accepted; **as in the life of King Saul** who sought to destroy David because the people sang David's praise to a greater extent than his own; **and as in the life of the Jewish religious leaders** who crucified Christ due to their envy of His following among the people ("For he [Pilate—GLP] knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy" Mark 15:10; James 4:1-2). Dear ones, envy is no small sin. Treat it as deadly—as a poisonous viper that must be destroyed, lest it destroy you.

b. Envy is a sin against the grace of God, who freely gives to all their respective gifts and graces (1 Corinthians 4:7).

c. Envy is a sin against God's sovereignty, for He gives to all as He wills (1 Corinthians 12:11).

d. Envy is a sin against God's wisdom. "I would have dispensed gifts in a better way than God."

e. Envy is a sin against God's justice. "It's not fair that he/she should receive such gifts and not me." Envy wallows in self-pity, feeling sorry for oneself, and would rather be consumed with the gifts and graces of others than being consumed with serving and loving others with the gifts and graces received from the Lord.

2. Secondly (as to remedies to use to overcome envy in your life and mine), we must learn to turn our hearts from envy to thankfulness for all that we have received from the Lord. For a heart that is overwhelmed with thankfulness to the Lord for the glories of creation, providence, and salvation will not be a heart that has time to envy the gifts and graces of others.

3. Thirdly, we must cry out to the Lord that He would teach

us to be content with what He has given to us and where He has placed us presently. If it is a time of preparation and training, we must learn contentment in that situation. If it is a time of waiting, let us be patient and not rash. If it is a place of learning many lessons that we have failed to learn thus far in the School of Christ, then we must humble ourselves, be teachable, and learn and practice those divine lessons in our life, in order that we might graduate by God's grace to the next grade in the School of Christ.

4. Fourthly, we must learn to sincerely rejoice in the benefits, gifts, graces, and blessings of others, as if they were our own. For in a sense, the gifts and graces of others are our own, as we are members of the same body of Christ (Mark 10:28-30).

5. Finally, we must be filled with God's love for us, and occupied with serving one another with the love of God. The love of God alone can destroy our envy of the gifts and graces of others. To grow in knowing the unfathomable love of God for us whose sins and offenses would reach the heavens if they were to be counted against us, and to grow in practicing that love toward one another in following Christ is the means of destroying envy. Once again that will only be realized as you make your time spent with Christ a joy and a delight every day (where Christ is not a stranger, but a lover of your soul). That is the earnest desire of the Christian.

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