

## LET NOT THINE HEART ENVY SINNERS

Proverbs 23:1-35

June 1, 2014

**“Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the Lord all the day long.”**

Proverbs 23:17

Envy, covetousness and jealousy are a sin-category that is condemned in strongest terms by Scripture. Covetousness is named among the vilest sins: “no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God” (Eph. 5:3). “Neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God” (I Cor. 6:6).

It is not always possible to distinguish between envy, covetousness and jealousy. Their meanings often overlap. Covetousness is a lust to accumulate possessions. “Jealousy” focuses this lust upon a specific item and person. “Envy” often manifests malice toward that person, as was the case when Israel’s religious leaders sought Christ’s death: Pilate “knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy” (Mark 15:10; Acts 7:9; 13:45).

These sins are doubtless **roots from which many other sins grow**. Theft (Josh. 7:21), adultery (Ex. 20:17), lying (Acts 5:1-11) and violence (Acts 7:9) are connected with envy in Scripture. They fuel hatred, and hatred begets murder. Yet they would not be recognized as a sin if Scripture did not command, “Thou shalt not covet” (Ex. 20:17). Indeed, only by Scripture did the Apostle Paul know that lust, a form of covetousness, is sin (Rom. 7:7).

These sins **focus upon wrong objects**. They crave riches, esteem and power, not godliness righteousness, mercy and kindness. This wrong focus diminishes appropriate regard for others, and incubates injustice. To counter this, multiple Old Testament laws govern actions toward the poor, the widow and the “stranger.” Portions of harvests were to remain in the fields for the poor (Lev. 19:9; Deut. 24:20). Usury (interest) was not to be charged when loaning money to the poor (Ex. 22:25, Lev. 25:36). Collateral was not to include items needed for daily living (Ex. 22:26; Deut. 24:6-17). God takes the cause of those who are downtrodden (Prov. 23:10-11). Pure and undefiled worship focus upon the well-being of the powerless (Jas. 1:27).

**These sins express discontent with God**, who has dealt to everyone the talents and potential of which life is made. Their fruit violates God’s law and His will. They are opposite the one and only example of godliness: Jesus Christ. He did not seek anything for Himself (John 5:30, 8:50; Matt. 20:28). Although He was the fullest revelation of God to man (John 1:1, 14; 10:30-37; 14:9, 10), He “made himself of no reputation” (Phil. 2:7). He was “in the form of God,” yet did not grasp after the acclaim and reputation that this might seek, but “took upon him the form of a servant,” then bowed to the indignity of crucifixion (Phi. 2:-8).

These great sins can be forgiven. A greed-driven thief was forgiven as he was crucified beside Jesus. Scriptural condemnation of theft and covetousness includes assurance that these sins can be forgiven: “And such were some of you: but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God” (I Cor. 6:11)