



Envy – Part 2

The Relational Damage

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If you've ever been to my house, you might notice I've got some trees that are between my neighbor's and my driveway. And they look nice. But there are these secret things underground that I've learned about called roots that all these trees seem to have. And these roots are causing me some serious problems. It's messing up my driveway. Making the wall between my neighbor's house and mine fall over. It has torn up drains and pipes and it's been a mess. And the thing I've learned about these things called roots is they don't respect the property line between my property and my neighbor's. I've already paid a large amount of money to take care of his driveway, which he had to replace because of my trees. I've got several estimates about various things in my inbox right now and more that I probably need to acquire just to fix the damage caused by these roots. I even had someone out recently with a camera. They put a camera through the pipes to figure out kind of like where my roots are tearing up my pipes.

That's kind of what this sermon series is really about. It's about getting underground. And I know that some sins they blossom above ground, but there are sins that are underground. They are primary foundational vices and the light needs to be attached to the camera, and the light of God's word needs to get under the surface to see where the roots of the sin that we have been looking at in the series here called "Envy," trying to figure out what's going on and what kind of damage is it causing. And much like the roots of my trees, you'll find out that they don't care about the property line. They will inevitably spill over into all of your closest relationships. And as one economist said that's the thing about envy. It is a local sin. It really is. And he's writing about, an American economist, about the fact that you can hear the resentment and you can see the resentment in the words of people looking at billionaires and venture capitalists and, you know, all the people who are making loads of money in this world. But envy is a local thing, right? It's about the guy down the hall who got a bigger raise than you. It's about your brother-in-law who makes 20% more than you do. It's the local things that end up being problematic.

And you think, well, I don't think that's a Christian problem. I'm a Christian. My sins have been dealt with. Well, you need to read the book of First Corinthians at some point and see how much envy there was in that church. And even though they were firing apparently on all cylinders regarding spiritual gifts, the Spirit was present, he calls them saints, they have a big problem with envy that's breaking out in their church. The tentacles, the roots of that are causing damage. Not only that, you might think, well, I have a comfortable life. Well, the Corinthians, by the way, had a very comfortable life. It was the Orange County of the ancient world as we often say. People drove nice, you know, camels, they lived in nice homes, all of the kinds of things that you would think of. And yet, you know, that's the thing about envy. There's no one who is exempt from this, right? It's not as though if you were richer you wouldn't be envious. If you were more talented you wouldn't be envious. Do you think movie stars ever feel envy? Athletes? Famous people? Celebrities? Of course they do. I know they don't when they're signing your autograph, they don't have an envy problem there. But come,



you know, Academy Award night or come, you know, the NBA draft or the All-Star Game, that's when envy sets in. It doesn't matter, right?

I used to play an instrument in high school and was fairly proficient, at least for high schoolers. And, you know, the little kid wants to learn how to hold the instrument I'm playing, well, that's fine. It's kind of cute, but sure I'll help you with that. But the day I was put in charge of a, you know, a virtuoso who was in our team that, you know, was younger than I, and I'm supposed to be his leader and he plays better than I do and thinks better and can sight read better. It's just like all of a sudden now that's a problem. I don't have a problem if the disparity is big. I have a problem when it's all up close. And sometimes it's like the advertisers. We're use to the advertisers enlisting us to sell the wares of their clients.

The, you know, the men who are rich and they are, you know, ripped and they're successful. And the women who are beautiful and charming and confident, we're used to seeing that. We pass by and we might be invoked in our hearts to feel some greed about the watches that they're selling or the handbags or whatever. But, you know, it's when those kinds of people, the rich and the ripped and the successful and the beautiful and the charming and the confident, when those people are in my small group, I mean, those are the people who surround me in the office and I look in the mirror or I think about my aptitudes or intelligence or whatever I have and I have this underlying envy. And much like roots of a tree, there's no way that those aren't going to erupt. They're going to cause trouble. And the things you don't think can be moved in your life, the virtues that you think are paragon, they're solid, they're going to be knocked over by this thing unless we chop it down, unless we go and work hard at it.

Now, the heart of this series, it's only four parts, and this is part two if you're new, we'll get into a lot of the counterattack next time. But much like that camera that has been sent out to my home to figure out just how bad the damage is, we need to really assess the breadth of the damage. We need to start looking at the relational damage that is caused by envy that you may not even have connected the dots to. That's why today I want to start in Mark Chapter 7 and try and have us do a little bit more assessment here. We've tried to define what it is. Now think through with me again what envy is. Envy is not just wanting what other people have. We can have that, we can covet. We can have a strong desire for the things that other people have. You gals can say, "I wish I looked like her," or guys, "I wish I had, you know, the abilities that he has," or "I wish I had the money or the resources or the relationships they have." You can have that coveting of your neighbor and of his wife and his oxen and his fields and all that.

But envy is more than that. Envy is when you now feel resentment toward that person. It's like "he's got something I want and I now don't really like that he has it. I don't care for the fact that he has it. I am thinking differently about this person who has it. I can't act normal. Like you don't have stuff that I want." And we see that all throughout the Bible. I was flying on a flight recently and this guy, you know, a lot of us like aisle seats, right? We can cross our legs, whatever. And you got to be careful not to get hit by the cart as it comes down the aisle with your knee. But he got his seat. I got my seat. And we were sitting across from each other and

in come these two like five and six-year-old kids with a mom. Well the kids get plopped next to him, the window and the middle seat and the mom's like two seats forward and she's all just a little (funny noises) and "it's okay and they're going to be here." And so he does what I think any gentleman would do, what I would have done. "So well I will just switch seats with you. And you can come sit by your children." And then she says, "Well, I'm in the middle seat." And he goes, "Oh, never mind. I don't want to sit in the middle seat." And I get that. I think I would have, I hope I would have given up my middle seat. But I thought but now you're stuck with these two kids. Right?

And picture the angst, you know, he was, I think, maybe regretting his decision halfway through the flight. But, you know, you got the two kids there and you picture them like the way kids are. One wants the window and then the other one wants the window. And then it's like, "no, I want the window" and "I want the window." And they're fighting over the window seat. And then finally mom might come back, as she did a few times and kind of straighten it out and say, "Okay, no, no, no. Sally, or whatever, you get the window seat." And so you get in that seat. And it's not just like you're upset as you sit in the middle seat as a little kid looking at your sibling. It's not just you say like, "Well, okay, I wish I had the seat." It's like all of a sudden now Johnny punches Sally, right? It's like, "okay, well, why did you do that?" Right? "Well, it's because I don't like that you have it. Now I have some angst toward you. I have, and here was how we defined it last week, resentment toward you. And that resentment is going to spill out in one way or another. And I know you're really subtle and careful and very diplomatic about how we express our sins, but this is one, I guarantee you, if you start connecting dots in Scripture, you'll see it everywhere.

So we're going to try to look at the damage that envy can cause. And I want to start by looking at Mark Chapter 7 verses 21 through 23. Now look at the context here of this, because the first relationship it messes up is our relationship with God and the relationship we have with ourselves. And I want you to note this and see this. The great thing about the Christian life is when you have a new relationship with God, to quote the Old Testament promise of Ezekiel, you are going to have your "heart of stone replaced with the heart of flesh." But you're going to have a heart that's made new, a clean heart. It gets washed with water. These symbols are pictures of the cleansing of sin, the guilt of my sin, even the bondage to my sin. It's broken. It's a new relationship with God. And there's a new relationship with myself really here. But it doesn't mean, and we know this, it doesn't mean as James said, we all sin in many ways, "We all stumble in many ways." We're going to have even, Hebrews 12, sins that so easily entangle us, besetting sins. And so we've got to watch out for those. And that's why the church has always talked about the seven deadly sins. They are foundational fountain heads of sin, sins that are going to erupt, and one of them is envy.

And he makes a list here of a lot of sins. And they're concerned about the defilement, which is an interesting word, by the way. Defilement. And they're saying, well, this defiles your followers, they're not washing their hands. Defilement. Think about that word. To defile something ceremonially in the Old Testament, there were things that would make you defiled in the Levitical Law. That was obviously an analogy of the reality of how sin defiles us before God and our relationship with God. I'm guilty before God. And if you didn't do the right things,



the right way in the Levitical Law, then you were ceremonially unclean. You were defiled. Well, the real defilement that we should be concerned with isn't some of the human traditions that have been set in place by the time of Christ like washing your hands in a ceremonial way before you ate. And Jesus said, "Listen, if you're concerned about that? Those things don't defile you." They're not external things like, you know, unwashed hands that are going to defile you as you eat your fish for lunch. What's going to defile you is what's going on in your heart, what you allow to go on in your heart.

You can pick it up there in verse 21, "For from within," you can see the last two words, by the way, verse 20, "defiles him." We're talking about things that defile me and they're inside. For "Out of the heart of man, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery," look at these now, "coveting, wickedness, deceit, sensuality," here's the next one, the topic of our little series, "envy, slander, pride, foolishness. All of these evil things come from within, and they..." contaminate, they sully, they dirty, "they defile," they mess up the heart that is supposed to be before God holy and pure and right and righteous and good. So, we are trying to fight sin, right? We are called to battle it, Colossians 3:5, to "put to death" in our lives whatever is fleshly, whatever remains as an earthly, sinful part of our old life. We're fighting our old life. That's called sanctification. It's aggressive. It's an aggressive battle with the passions that wage war against my soul. We dealt with that last week foundationally. I need to realize that when there are things that exist there that are defiling, they're contaminating that and it troubles it. It's like, speaking of trouble, that's a good word, in John 14, Jesus, it's a different context, but he tells them, "Let not your hearts be troubled." Don't let the interior of your life be troubled. "Believe in God; believe also in me. In my Father's house there are many rooms," many places. "If it weren't so, I would have told you." You know the passage. "I'm going to go prepare a place, I'm going to be with you."

So he's talking about his relationship to them, where you are, I'm going to be. I'm not going to leave you an orphan. The whole point of the Upper Room Discourse, talk about lessons from the Upper Room that we're going to deal with this summer. That is about God saying, I'm going to be with you and when I'm with you, the Holy Spirit indwells within you. We got things that are defiling you, we need to get those things out. They defile, they mess you up. And if you think about what it's like to be right with God and walking with God and in harmony with God and to extract and cleanse and get out of my life, confess out of my life, all the defilement, well, that leaves you in a good place. That leaves you with a clear conscience. That leaves you with you and God being copacetic and peaceful and harmonious. And you have a sense of walking in this world while the attacks are coming toward you. But you got your armor on, right? And you're fighting the schemes of the devil. And it's like, okay, I'm in a good place with God. But when there are roots growing in your heart of anything on that list, including envy, well then there's a defilement there.

The word to kind of describe the life, and I know it has a lot of implications, that's in sync with God, walking with God. Right? Impervious to, you know, to whatever might disrupt that. We call that word "contentment." We talk about that in Scripture, contented. I'm okay. It doesn't matter if there's a storm going on as we learned last week. I can be okay with God. I have peace with God. So what I want to remind you of this morning is the defiling work of envy is



always going to disrupt that. It will displace that. Or how about a stronger word? Number one if you're taking notes, it crushes that. Number one, you need to "Know Envy Crushes Contentment." If I'm going to say, "Why would I work so hard at routing out a secret sin I didn't even know about, you know, two weeks ago? I wasn't even thinking about it before I came into church. Why would I care? You make me feel guilty. Is that the point?" No, it's not about you feeling guilty. It's about us seeing the damage it causes. And when we assess the damage that it causes, including that I'm going to be discontent if I don't get this out. Not only do I have a problem now relating to God, like Adam, I want to hide in the shadows when God or God's Word or God's people come into my presence, I'm struggling now. There's a defiling contradiction within my heart, and it makes me feel not right.

Well, it makes me feel not right on a couple of levels because you're harboring sin. But worse than that, the whole point of envy is to make you discontent. Make you discontent with what you don't have. Right? That's the coveting element of it. It makes me now look at people differently. That's what envy does. It's like jealousy, an unjust jealousy. It's like, I don't like that you have it. I don't want you to have it. And now there's animosity, even as it says in our passage. Things that follow envy are things like slander. I now have issues. I'm now making damage in my relationships. You need to know that envy crushes contentment. And I would like my heart to be contented. I don't want it contaminated or soiled. I don't want it disrupted.

Can I turn you to James 3? There are several passages I'd like us to look at together. There is a picture of this peaceful, harmonious, copacetic kind of heart. It's described in James 3:13 as being a person who is characterized with words like "wise" and "understanding." Take a look at this text. James 3:13, "Who is wise and understanding among you? By his good conduct," there's a righteous man walking righteously, "let him show his works," that's the expression of his life, that's the tree, "in the," here it is, "the meekness," the humility, "of wisdom. But if you have bitter jealousy..." Now, I said, sometimes jealousy is used in a rightful sense that God is jealous. Exodus 34:14. You have a lot of examples of jealousy being appropriate in the right setting. Then you have the unjust and inappropriate jealousy, and that's synonymous really with envy. It's that disruption. I said last week, jealousy is a word, in the Greek New Testament, is the word transliterated "zeal." It's something that it's bubbling up. It's moving, it's active. It's doing something in my heart. It doesn't let me be at peace. And look at the word here that describes it, the word "bitter." Do you see that descriptive, that adjective? "Pikros" in the Greek text, it's bitter. It tastes like something that you want it to be sweet and it's like someone poured a half of container of salt into it. It's gross. You want to spit it out. That pikros, the bitter, salty, gross tasting jealousy. Right? The envy.

And, here's what that is all about, it's about "selfish ambition in your hearts." If you have that, if that's what's going on, if that's what's motivating whatever it might be as we saw Solomon saying, it may be motivating your excellent work at the office. It may be motivating how you function in church or the kind of ministries you take on or the time you put into something or whatever. You might be driving hard. But really what's pushing that is a bitter jealousy and a selfish ambition. Which, by the way, and I don't know how to rightly try and round this topic out in the manner of sermons that I've given to this, which is only four. But I am not trying to say that there's not a godly ambition. You know that, right? A godly ambition. There's a godly



ambition. In other words, "The man who aspires," to quote First Timothy Chapter 3 verse 1, "to the office" of an elder, of a pastor, "of an overseer, he desires a noble thing." And the word there, by the way, is the word "Epithumia." Epithumia is the word we translate elsewhere into "lust." You can have a strong desire to do something that's just so that you can spend it on your pleasures, or you can have a strong desire to do something noble and good and right. And there are a lot of people rightly motivated to desire ambitiously things that are godly and good for God's glory and God's honor and the good of other people.

They're like Christ who came to serve us. "He didn't come to be served, he came to serve and give his life as a ransom." There's no envy driving any of that. There's no jealousy, no bitterness there. And so there is a godly ambition. Paul tells Timothy as he's doing his ministry and exercising his gifts and discharging his duty, think about what he said. He said, "Let your progress be evident to everyone," right? I mean, keep on moving forward. Let everyone see that you're getting better and better at this. Why? So he can do this, selfish ambition? It's not about that. It's about him being the steward of the gifts that God has given him. As Paul says, "I've worked harder than all the other apostles." Right? "Oh, it looks like you're a competitive, go-getting, selfish ambition person." I suppose that could be motivating it. What kind of roots are under this work of yours? What kind of motivation is there about you dressing for church? What kind of thing do you have about getting your kids ready for some party they're about to walk into and you're telling them? Why are you doing all of that? What's driving that? Could there be a proper motive and can there be a sinful motive? Yes. Can you be rightly ambitious about fulfilling your stewardship? Yes. Can you also be sinfully motivated?

Solomon said that I've seen "there is this grievous evil under the sun." Right? I mean, the work that people are doing out of envy for their neighbor, there's so much of this that when envy is driving it, you don't sit back at the end of the day and you think, "Lord, I served you, and I hope that I served you well here." It's like, no, there's just this dying and driving, corrosive kind of internal turmoil. Envy always brings that. If you have bitter jealousy or envy and selfish ambition, don't boast and be false to the truth. Your ambition is not godly ambition. This is not the wisdom that comes down from above. It is earthly. It is unspiritual. And it is, as we started last week, it's demonic. The angels that fell, they fell for the ambitious ideas the early church liked to preach about that. That idea of getting something that wasn't theirs, that wasn't supposed to be theirs, having an undue, unmitigated kind of desire for stuff for themselves. That envy, that covetousness. It's demonic. "For where jealousy and selfish ambition exists," where there's envy and selfish ambition, "there will be," here it comes, "disorder and every vile practice."

Now, the first part, I just want to say is disorder and the disorder starts in our hearts. Everybody likes to be diagnosed today, it seems, with a disorder, we've got a disorder. Right? The disorders that we should ultimately be concerned about, the biggest disorder, well, is there a disorder in my heart? And here's one thing you need to test for, envy. Do I envy? Do I want what other people have and do I not like the fact that they have it? Is there growing resentment toward people who seem to be better than I am, smarter than I am, prettier than I am, more successful, more influential, have more opportunities, have more advantages, are poised to do more because of whatever they got on a silver platter that I don't happen to



have, am I bitter about it? Is there bitter jealousy in my heart? Well, there is going to be disorder. It's going to start in your heart and every vile, vile practice.

The wisdom from above is different. And this is what we want. "It's pure, it's peaceable, it's gentle, it's open to reason, it's full of mercy and good fruits, it's impartial and it's sincere." We'll learn a lot more about that in our counterattack as we try to form that next time. "And a harvest of righteousness is sown." Here's the word we want. What did Jesus say? He came to leave us? "Don't let your hearts be troubled. I'll give you peace, my peace I leave with you." Peace. "It's sown in peace by those who make peace." Peace, peace, peace versus disorder and bitter jealousy. I want that. The goal, by the way, is always for the godly to be content. Hebrews Chapter 13 verse 5. "I want to be content with what I have." Paul, Philippians 4. "I've learned the secret of contentment, whether I have a lot or a little, I'm content." Now you got to believe that when you see godly people and you know there's no underlying turmoil, the roots are not rotten, right? The roots are not seeping into the neighbor's property. They know their proper bounds. They're enriched properly and not destroying. And envy always will destroy. You need to know that envy crushes contentment.

And I guess we've seen a little bit of it in our passage here in James Chapter 3. There's "disorder in every vile practice." A lot of these vice lists can go back to the core sin of envy. Let me give you one in Titus Chapter 3 verse 3. It's next to the second point here on your outline. It's the opposite of peace. It's the opposite of contentment. It's the opposite of joy. It's filled with this bitterness and this frustration and this angst and this friction. Titus Chapter 3 verse 3. "For we ourselves," I quoted this last time, "were once foolish, disobedient, led astray, slaves to various passions and pleasures, passing our days in malice and envy," those go together. Malice is how I'm feeling and envy is the driving force of it all. And the end result is hostilities. Right? "Hated by others and hating one another." Okay, jot this down. Number two, we need to "See the Hostilities Envy Brings." We need to see the hostilities that envy brings.

Once you write that down, go with me to James Chapter 4. I warned you there are plenty of passages here this weekend. James Chapter 4. James Chapter 4 does a good thing for us in telling us, now I want you to think backwards when the thing erupts in your life that you know is not good. You don't feel good about it. Your blood pressure rises. You start to get a little warm under the collar. You go home thinking, "Well, that didn't go well," you tell your wife. Why? Right? James says, I want you to analyze it. I want you to take a look and do a diagnostic on what just happened. You left that small group. It didn't go well. It got heated. He's saying think about it. Go backwards. Don't say, "Well, I really need to bite my lip harder next time."

James Chapter 4 verse 1. Are you there? "What causes quarrels?" What's the root of it? "What causes quarrels and what causes fights among you?" Look at that now. "Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you?" That's just such a helpful concept right there. It's not just I really have an anger problem. Anger is not a problem, it's a symptom. You understand that, right? Anger is a symptom of something else. And what we need to find out is why do you have this underlying hostility? Why is it that you were, as a non-Christian,

"always hating and being hated" and now as a Christian, you know, we've tried to change all that and it's different now and I'm on a pathway of sanctification, but it still erupts every now and then. Why is this? Why am I having these conflicts? "What causes quarrels and causes fights among you? Is it not this, that your passions are at war within you? You desire and do not have, so you murder," which, by the way, that's the whole idea of envy.

Envy is this thing, like Cain who hated his brother. And John says, why did he hate his brother? Well he hated his brother because he saw that there was a deficiency. He had an inferiority complex. Think this through, right? "I'm not him. He got accepted. He got favor." How did I define envy last time? I said it was this resentment because of comparative blessings or opportunities. Right? There's favor there that he has that I don't have. And God comes on the scene. What does he say to Cain? "Just chill out, man. Between you and I, you do well and things will be okay." And he couldn't. He had to keep his brother in view, even though he claimed later that he's not his brother's keeper. Man, you couldn't get your eye off of your brother. That's what envy is, "Invidia," right? I put my eye on him. You're looking at your brother. You can't get your eyes off him, you resent your brother because of an advantage or an opportunity that he has that you don't have. Why did Cain kill his brother? Well, you got to look past the violence back to the driving force. And the driving force is envy. "I resent you because you got something I don't have, something that I want. And I don't like that you have it."

Now, if we both walked away, think about it. If we both walked away without the favor of God. Right? At least they'd go, "Oh, yeah, God's kind of hard to please." Or if Mom says, "Hey, sir, can you sit by the window? And my two kids, they're not going to. Neither of them is going to get the window." Guess what? They probably aren't going to punch each other. Well kids find ways to figure out why to punch each other. But they're not going to punch each other because one has the window and the other doesn't. Right? They're going to be like they both lost. It's the relative distinction between the two. That's the problem. You desire and do not have. I didn't get what I wanted and someone else did. And that's why I lash out at them. You covet. You want something. That's the problem, covetousness. You can't obtain it, right? So you fight and quarrel. And sometimes it's just the attainment of it. It looks like he's winning the argument and I'm not. It looks like everyone thinks that he's right and I'm wrong. I don't like that he's won the approval of the small group and I haven't. I don't like that he's been appointed or she's taken this position or she gets the attention of that guy or whatever it might be. I don't like it. So I'm going to fight. I'm going to quarrel. I'd like to have it.

Well, you do not have because you don't ask. "Mom, can I sit by the window seat?" Well, you ask and you don't receive. Right? Because you're asking wrongly. Because envy is still driving it. Even your prayer life, even your religious life, your Christian life, your service, going through Partners or taking someone through Partners or teaching a Sunday school class or leading or going on a youth retreat as a leader, all of it can be driven by your own envious passions. "You ask and you don't receive because you ask wrongly, to spend it on your passions." The world, by the way, according to Titus 3:3 is all about, "You adulterous people, you bound yourself to me. I gave you a new heart. "Don't you know that friendship with the world," I mean, you're acting like the world, "is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to



be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God," which the world is all about it. It's about "the lust of the eyes the lust of the flesh," the boastful pride of life." It's about spending everything on your own passions, about you getting yours and making sure that you're content with what you have. And it's great when I can be the best and win the awards.

And in a day where we've trained our children that everyone gets a participation trophy, think this through now, we don't even want them to live without anything. Well, we want everyone to have records. We won't even let the kids keep score when they're playing baseball. What? Are we crazy? Have we lost our minds? What are you doing? Right? "Oh, I don't want junior to think that he's not special." Well, junior isn't special compared to the other guy because he's better than your kid. I mean, you've got to get to a place at some point where you recognize the relative distinctions. We'll drive this home when we get to the counterattack. We have to understand that. But we cannot just go along with the rest of the world.

Now, here's a passage and I struggle with this construction. And I think every New Testament is going to have some kind of marginal note. It's one of the most difficult Greek constructions in the New Testament, verse 5. "Do you suppose it is of no purpose that the Scripture says...?" Now, here's how the English Standard Version translates it. "He yearns jealously over the spirit that he's made to dwell in us." That's a difficult text. Now that I'm looking at it, at least in my English Standard Version that I've got, the version I've got doesn't even have a footnote here. Does it? Does yours.? No. Just pull up any translation and you're going to see people go in different directions with this. Even the King James back in the day, it just literally takes this wooden sentence and translates it this way. "The spirit who dwells in us yearns to envy," which may be the right translation. Matter of fact, I even gave you a little preview of this last week when I said all the usages of the word envy in the New Testament are always negative. Jealousy, positive and negative. Envy, negative. There's no good redeeming value for the word envy. And I said, "Well, with the exception of possibly James Chapter 4."

Well, it could be that maybe consistently we'd say, "Well, envy isn't a good word and if it's not a good word the only way you could translate this is "the spirit," small "s", "that he's made to dwell in us it envies." Maybe even the way it's put here. It's not that "he," subject God, yearns jealousy, but the spirit that he's put in us yearns jealously, that we are envious and it tends to envy and it wants to envy and it desires to envy. And that's the problem. That's why we as Christians, we start acting like the world. But God gives more grace. He can help us through this. "Therefore, it says, 'God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.' So submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he'll flee from you. Draw near to God, and he'll draw near to you." You got to "cleanse your hands, you sinners." All of this, I think, in the context, certainly has the idea not just God wants you, but you want stuff that you can't rightly attain or can't justly figure out how to attain or is not righteously yours. But you've got someone else who has it and you're jealous over them. You are envious of them and become resentful of them. And if it were your little sister, you'd punch her. That is the idea of the kinds of struggling that this passage starts with. You need to analyze the problems, quarreling, fighting, look underneath the surface.



One more passage. First Timothy Chapter 6. I say one more. That just means the next passage. First Timothy Chapter 6. The hostility that envy brings, it always brings conflict. And there are lots of words that surround the expressions of envy, and there are a bunch of them in this text. I think they all come back to this foundational sin of envy. To get some context verse 3. First Timothy Chapter 6 we'll look at verse 3 to, let's go to 10 if we have time. "If anyone teaches a different doctrine," different form of teaching, different kind of teaching, it's not biblical, "that doesn't agree with the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness, well, then he's puffed up with conceit and understands nothing." Right? Not very diplomatic there, but certainly truthful. That's it. You're just whacked. In your brain you think you're something when you're nothing. You're preaching stuff that doesn't accord with Scripture, with what Christ said.

But here he gets to the heart of it. "He has an unhealthy craving for controversy and for quarrels about words, which produce," and they also I would argue they're also foundationally driven by, "envy." They produce "envy, dissension, slander, evil suspicions, and constant friction among people who are depraved in mind and deprived of the truth, imagining that godliness is a means of gain. But godliness with contentment is great gain, for we brought nothing in the world, we can't take anything out of the world." Man, if you just had enough to eat today and a place to sleep with "food and covering, with these we'll be content."

The Christian life and the copacetic, harmonious relationship that we should have with God and with our own hearts is one of contentment. The problem is we envy, we pridefully covet. And in that it creates all these things: quarrels, controversy, dissension, slander, suspicions. Think about some of you. You look at other people with a great sense of distrust. And it's only because they have stuff that you don't have. They have advantages you don't have. They have gifts you don't have. They have opportunities you don't have. They have a family you don't have. They have relationships you don't have. And you look at them askew, as I said last week. You look at them out of the edge of your eye. You don't like it. You are going to even have this eruption of anger toward them. Saul. David kills his ten thousands. Saul, you've killed your thousands and that's cool. But David his ten thousands. Saul was so angry over that he kept his eye on David, that evil suspicion, and then when the evil spirit came upon him and took him to the next level, he erupted with anger, took his spear out and tried to pin David against the wall. We read that passage last week. And that is the outburst of anger that James would say, "Stop and look at what's going on here."

Now here's the deal. You think that your relationship, Saul, with God is somehow going to give you stuff that you want, and that means there'll be no one greater in the kingdom than you. No, David is greater than you, at least in how many people he's killing. He's a better warrior, better military strategist. He's just a kid, but he's better than you. And you can't handle that because you think if I'm right with God, I get what I want. And see, so many people, by the way, are pitching a kind of gospel and evangelicalism that says, come to Christ, he'll give you what you want. It's a genie in a bottle and you pray to God and you can have the family that you covet, right? You can have the job that you envy the other person has. And all I'm saying is that's not it.

Here's what godliness is. It's contentment. Right? That's the great gain of being a Christian is that you can be content where you're at in the station of life that you have with the giftedness you have with the position God calls you to do. Doormat? Passive? I didn't say that. Ambition? Sure there's ambition. Can you aspire to something in terms of doing great things for God? Absolutely. But it cannot be fueled by envy. We have to distinguish what's driving this and I'll show you next time we get that counterattack going, you'll see how we can carefully distinguish the two. But all I'm trying to do today is say what kind of damage is caused? Well think about things that to you just seem like, why am I so hostile to that person? Why don't I like that person? And you've said it in your own heart if you haven't said it to your spouse or your best friend, I just don't like that person. Why don't you like that person? Why is there constant friction? Why do you find yourself quarreling? Why do you find yourself in controversy? Why is there that evil suspicion and slander?

The word for slander in this passage by the way is the word blasphemy. Right? We get the word blasphemy, obviously, from that word. Blasphemy. When we were in the book of Luke years ago and we were looking at the passage about the blasphemy of the Holy Spirit. They were really blaspheming Christ. I taught you how to think about that word. Blasphemy, I said, is just taking something that's up here and acting and talking and commentating on it as though it's down here. Slanders is a good word for us when we think about each other. But the reason they don't translate this straight across like they do in other passages by transliterating it blasphemy is because we would think, "I don't understand. What are they a god? Right? That I have to blasphemy." Here's the point. Yeah, God is in a category by himself. And when you start saying Jesus doing miracles is doing them by Beelzebub, you clearly are blaspheming, you're attributing to Jesus stuff down here when really he's up here. Well, it's the same thing with individuals and they are a whole different category. But the guy that you would praise for the things that he does if he were your son, is not the way you praise him or think of him. You speak of him down here. You always find the negative things. You look with evil suspicion and you're always trying to find the negatives about her. The negatives about that family. The negatives about that church. The negatives about that aspect of that sub-congregation of the church. Wherever the rivalries are I'm going to think less of that. That's a blasphemy.

And by the way, there's another word, this conceit, swollen conceit that really is on the same spectrum. There are people, for instance in First Corinthians Chapter 3 who are all about Apollos, and Paul and Cephas. Smile at me if you remember that passage. Do you remember that passage? And what were they doing here? They weren't taking the other guy necessarily and blaspheming him, speaking less of him. I don't think they were going around slandering, you know, Peter. There might have been a little bit of that, but what they were doing is they were flattering their favorite leader. They were pumping up their team. It's like high schools that are having their pep rallies on Friday, talking with superlative terms about their high school, you know, quarterback or their team. Well, they're not that good. Stop. Right? Why are you speaking in such grandiose terms about your football team? Right? Did you see their record from last year? They're not that good. No, but they're great on Fridays because the cheerleaders and the pep band and everybody are out there saying they're great, they're



great, they're great. And we're exalting our group so we can look at your team in your high school and you guys are losers, right?

The idea of rivalry in the church is sometimes about flattering the people who I think will make me a part of the winning team. You just need to see that all of that is driven by envy. The envy in the church of Corinth was causing divisions. The chasm between groups of people, the chasms between relationships, the people you used to be friends with that you're not friends with anymore is often driven by envy. And sometimes it means you speaking less of those guys and that group or that team or that wife. Right? And sometimes it's about you exalting your family and your kids and your church and your group. And all of that is just trying to make this distinction and that distinction is driven and fueled by envy. We've got to identify the problem. Blasphemy.

Gossip, by the way, is blasphemy. Did you know that? Proverbs Chapter 20 verse 19, it's a Hebrew equivalent, but "Whoever goes around slandering reveal secrets; therefore don't associate with the," gossip or as it's put in the English Standard Version, "simple babbler." It just rolls off their tongue. They're going to whisper and babble about people. Right? So the gossip is slandering and they're trying to reveal secrets. Here's something I wouldn't say to you about my kids if ever I was talking about my kids, because I like my kids and it's good and so I say good things. But you say bad things if you don't like them and you want to tell other people the bad things because you want to tear them down. But really what's driving that is that you're envious. They have stuff, advantages, they have gifts you don't have. Envy is driving the division. Envy is driving the gossip. Envy is driving the slander. Envy is causing the friction. Envy is causing your attitude. Envy is causing the look on your face when someone announces that they're having a baby or that they're going to Jamaica for their vacation or whatever it is. It's driving what you feel because you are envious. And you haven't cut the roots out.

Well, the gain in this passage is what we really should have looked at if we had more time in the first point is contentment. Contentment. Contentment is what we don't have enough of. And it's not passivity. Right? I want to work hard. I want to be "immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord," to quote First Corinthians Chapter 15 verse 58. I want to do that. But it's with the right motive, which means that I am not someone driven by and fueled by envy. I'm content. I'm content. Can you be content in a godly, ambitious person? Yes. Those are harmonious concepts and virtues. But I'm never going to be internally content if I'm driven by envy. I'm always going to have relational problems with people because of my envy. Right? Envy is the problem. Contentment, being content with who I am, what I have, where I'm at. Right? That's what we need a whole lot more of. And here's the associated word "peace," right? Peace. It's the harvest that's sown in peace and it reaps peace and it's about peace. And we don't have it as much as we should, but we are the one organization that has the opportunity and the wherewithal to get it done. And we ought to be salt and light in our society because our society is never going to have that. It's a problem in our society.

Number three, Romans Chapter 1 verse 28. Maybe you know the context of this. Romans Chapter 1. Here's the theme. The theme is, it starts I suppose, early on in this argument after



the salutations in setting up the, you know, who the recipients are and who they are and who Paul is. You know, there's a righteousness that's revealed and a wrath that's revealed. There's a righteousness that's revealed he's going to unpack that's coming in the book. Right? Chapters 4, 5, 6, 7, 8. But there is a wrath that's coming, a justice that's coming. And he's going to unpack that in Chapters 2 and 3. And that wrath that is coming starts with the truth that God has revealed himself in nature. I'm going to get into Chapter 2. He's revealed himself in conscience. But that wrath is coming on people who have been so rebellious against God and his ways that he has, here's the repeated refrain, "turned them over." He's turned them over. He's given them over. Right? He's let them just be. "You're going to fight me. You're going to have the fruit of your sin." And so that's what's going on in this chapter. And if you turn to Romans Chapter 1, look at verse 28 and see how this is put.

Since they were so stubborn, since they didn't acknowledge God, since they didn't respond to natural theology and to conscience and the things that he's about to unpack in the next chapter. But they didn't do that. Well, then God gave them up. There's another way to put it. Gave them over, "Gave them up to a debased mind." A mind that's just not what it ought to be. It's an unrighteous mind, it's a sinful mind. "To do what ought not to be done." He's already talked about some of those things, the sexual immorality, the perversion, homosexuality, all the things going on in this context. And "they were filled with all manner of unrighteousness," look at these words now, "evil, covetousness, malice. And they're full of envy and murder," to speak of Cain, "and strife and deceit and maliciousness. They're gossips. They're slanderers, haters of God," that's foundational, "insolent, haughty, boastful, inventors of evil, disobedient to parents, foolish, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Oh, they know God's righteous decree, they know it intuitively, but those who practice such things deserve to die." Their conscience keeps telling them that. That's why they're so depressed and so frustrated and always in therapy, right?

"They did not only do those things, but they gave their approval to those who practice them." Now, if you ever want, like the fine print at the end of a commercial about the current state of our world, this is it, right? Verses 28 through 32. I mean, that's it. Verses 28 through 31 is the list of the problems. And at the heart of it is this maliciousness, this covetousness, this evil, this malice, this envy. The world is full of this. There's no restraint. The common grace of God in conscience is so worn down in our day that the things that people used to be ashamed of are now, there are parades for them, right? This is the stuff we used to hide. The Brady Bunch wouldn't even show a toilet on their show. Right? Ricardo and Lucy slept in two separate beds. Even things that we're so used to, conjugal rights in marriage, you know, Marcia Brady going to the bathroom. Those are things we wouldn't even think of. Sorry, now you just thought of it. (audience laughs) Now all of a sudden it's all the sin and the perversion and everything else you can see here, strife and murder, deceit, maliciousness. Now all that is joyfully on display and hearty approval to those who do it if they do it for the right reasons. And so our culture is filled with this.

And all I only want to say with just a little bit of time I got left, number three, you need to "Discern Envy's Damage to Society." Now, I know it's not our job, nor can we successfully fix this fully, but we can certainly be a growing force of a church that lives this out, models this.



Whenever we have opportunity, we speak to our society, our culture, and we say, this is a problem and you guys need to understand that what you need is Christ because Christ can deal with the envy underneath the surface. Because envy, maliciousness, covetousness, those are the things you want and can't obtain so you fight and quarrel. If that's true of the church, just think how true it is of the culture in which we live. Every society is prone to this. And I would say this: the symptomatic causes of the kind of sexual perversion that goes on at the end of any empire, whether it's Egypt or Assyria or Babylon or Mido-Persia or Greece or Rome, whatever it is, before the fall and collapse of those world empires, this is ramped up at the end. The symptomatic kinds of perversion that take place are driven by a covetousness and an envy.

As a matter of fact, it was capitalized on by, pardon the pun, "capitalized on" by Marx, Engels, Gramsci. Right? All of these theorists and leaders, political leaders, philosophers and ultimately people who led movements all capitalize on the sin of envy, class envy. Look at what's going on in our day, right? Income inequality. We've moved from equality in terms of meaning the ontological worth of individuals and fairness, we moved from that to equity now, which is some kind of hope for this Marxist fantasy of equal everything. Right? And let's just have a government own and government take over. Whether we're at full-blown Marxism or socialism or the idea at your job of Diversity and Equity and Inclusion, the DEI stuff that your H.R. departments are pushing, all of this ultimately is being fueled by and capitalizing on the sin of envy. You have to see this. The social justice movement, and you can see this throughout Scripture, by the way. Nations, for instance, like Israel, fell into all kinds of problems. It is not a good thing.

You know one of the biggest failures and I know you can think about the sovereignty of God and the plan of God and all that. Just like in redemption, you can say, "Well, yeah, God planned to redeem people and so Adam and Eve were going to fall." But you're not going to celebrate the fall, are you? You're not going to say, "Oh, it's a really good thing." You're not going to applaud when Eve goes and says, "Yeah, I think God's keeping something from me and I think God's a meanie and I'm going to do what I want to do." You're not going to go, "Yeah, it's great because then Christ can die on the cross for me." You're not going to do that. Nor should you ever rejoice in the fact that Israel got a king. "No. The king was going to come, Christ, was going to be the king and David was going to be the second king. Right? But I didn't think the first king was so good, Saul. But, you know, it was all part of God's plan." It was a part of God's plan. But you understand that here's how God commentated on the reality of them clamoring for a king. When Samuel comes and complains, the prophet, God says, "They haven't rejected you. I know they're going completely against what I'm telling you to tell them and they're not doing what you're saying. They're rejecting me."

And if you read about the reality of them careening into this terrible experiment with Saul, here's God even through Samuel recounting all the ways that if you're concerned about battles then go back to the hundreds of years in the book of Judges. "If the Midianites were arraying on the borders of Israel, did I not deliver you?" He talks about Jerubbaal or Gideon, which is his other name. You think about all the judges. You got 13 judges there and he keeps bringing them in. Whenever there is a problem we're going to get an army together. But



they said no. Here's what they said repeatedly. "We want to be like the other nations. We want to be like them. We don't have what they have. They get to go around and all their parades and stuff." And here they were warned, no, don't do it, don't do it, don't do it. Not only is it a rejection of God's plan for the theocracy that God had built, but they wanted a monarchy because everyone else had a monarchy. Huge and there are huge implications to what's going on in First Samuel Chapter 12.

But you can go back to the book of Numbers if you want to see envy at work within a society. Think about this. They now got out from underneath of Egypt's leadership. Kind of hard for you to think, "Well should be the pharaoh." Certainly in a well-established kingdom like that, Ramesses the Second or whoever it was at that particular time. Right? There's debate about that. But, now that we're out in the wilderness, we've got a lot of people out there. But now that we're out in the wilderness and we got a guy calling all the shots, now all of a sudden I can start to think, well, why that guy? Why does he...? He's in the 1%. I don't like that. He seems to be the guy who's in charge. Why is he? "Has God only spoken through him?" I just want to tell you that throughout the book of Numbers, you see it based on ethnicity. You see it based on power differentials. You see it based on economics. Right? "Why should we eat this manna? Right? Are you the only one that God has ever spoken to? Why are you doing this? You shouldn't have that. I should be the decision maker. I should be in charge. I should be the leader. Because you know what? In Egypt, guess what they're eating there, leeks and onions and melons and all. We don't get to have that. We want something else. We want more. We want the advantage. And here's the deal. We should be the ones making the decisions."

The reality of the kinds of rebellion, Korah's Rebellion in the book of Numbers, they're coming after the leadership because they want something they don't have and they are jealous and they are willing to attack Moses because of it. At one point they attack Moses and Aaron, and then even when it was dealing with the Cushite bride of Moses, well then Aaron and Miriam are attacking Moses. It's just amazing what you see. And God's commentary on this was the difference is Moses is humble. Not only that, when they came and said there are people out there prophesying. Do you remember? And they were thinking, you should be jealous and envious like everyone else is jealous and envious. And Moses said, "I would that all God's people were prophets. It's okay." He was content. He was willing to do whatever God called him to do. If that meant that he was the CEO and in the 1% of society, he was willing to do that. But he did not have selfish ambition in his heart. Matter of fact, God goes to great lengths to say he was a humble man. And that's the difference.

Even in God choosing David, you want to say that's not how leaders should be, "it should not be so among you," Jesus told his disciples. Different. Society is damaged because of an unbridled envy and jealousy and covetousness that is creating wars among ethnicities. It's creating wars among classes, it's creating wars among income levels. It's got to stop. It's got to stop and the only way it stops, at least historically, is when the empire implodes and collapses upon itself. And I'm not here to say, you know, make predictions about, you know, Western civilization, but I am here to say we got a problem and it's perhaps in our lifetimes at least as bad as it's ever been. The envy, the covetousness, the slander, the attacks, the constant friction among individuals.



There are distinctions in different gifts. There are differing blessings. There are differing opportunities. Something in the Bible is constantly pushing that in saying, "Listen, it's like the potter should not have to answer questions from the pots, 'Why did you make me this way?'" Paul says, I wish that you were all like myself, just like Moses could have said, I wish they were all prophets. But he says this, "Each man has his own gift from God. One has this kind of gift, another has another, another man has another kind of gift. It's the acceptance of the realities. It doesn't mean you can't go from a poor guy to leading the most profitable, you know, corporation in the world. That may happen. You better do it with the right ambition, a righteous ambition. But here's the deal. There's not going to be this constant resentment for those who have more than you, have more opportunity than you, have more open doors than you.

God decrees that variety. There are a variety of gifts. I know this is speaking of the church. But think about it in terms of the broader context of everything. But the same Spirit. Variety of services, the same Lord. Variety of activities, same God who empowers them all in everyone. That's why in the Protestant Reformation, the focus on the working class, understanding the glory of God can be accomplished in sweeping or mopping or changing a diaper, which was the reality of what they taught in the Protestant work ethic in the wake of the Protestant Reformation, to remind us that, listen, this kind of envy that everyone has, that everyone needs a trophy, that everyone needs an Academy Award, everyone needs an Emmy or something. Right? You got to have a Grammy. Everyone's got to be the top. You're not the top.

Your kids - stop lying to your kids saying they can do whatever they want. They can't do whatever they want. They can't be whatever they want. Not every kid can be whatever they want. The reality is God has assigned lots. He's assigned a set of gifts. He's assigned certain parameters to who we are and who we aren't and we shouldn't be envying each other. And our culture is just a mess. If you want a laboratory of watching how this goes if we don't control this in our church, what the church will look like, just look at the world. We'll be there and it will be, I'm a Paul, I'm an Apollos, I'm a Cephas, and you'll have the kind of infighting. And as Paul said to the Galatians, "you will bite and devour one another." And we can't have that. And sometimes looking at the world and discerning envy's damage to society can help us in this regard.

I don't have time for this. But I have a couple of minutes. Proverbs 23. Look at the way this is put. And there's so much here, and I wish I could give you commentary on all of it. But first one, Proverbs 23, "When you sit down to eat with a ruler." Now think about that. Here's the average person, here's the word now, you're going to eat with a ruler. In Solomon's day, talk about income differential. Huge. Right? Not, by the way, that collapsing it or compressing it is going to change anything. Right? And one pastor who at least that somebody is preaching on this topic years ago, preaching on the fact that you can take the differential of distinction, you talk about the peasants and the ruling class, even if it were just compressed. Right? In other words, if it's not like some guy makes billions of dollars a year, \$10 billion a year, and another guy, you know, who makes \$15,000 a year. Let's just say, as he puts it, let's just say



everyone makes anywhere between \$150,000 a year and \$120,000 a year. Would that end envy? Would it end class warfare? Will it end the 1% kind of frustration? Well, it won't end it. It won't end it at all. It really won't. It doesn't matter, right? The spectrum of beauty and ugliness. It doesn't matter. The power and the weakness. It doesn't matter the wealth and the poverty. No matter the distinction, it's that the distinction exists and you don't have everything that you want. You want to be at the top. And I'm just saying that's the underlying driving force of envy.

And so anyway, the differential in their day, ancient Near East here in the 10th century B.C., they would rarely, I mean think of an average person being called in to eat with a ruler, imagine the opulence of all of that. And then it says, hey, if you are "observed carefully what is before you, and put a knife to your throat if you're given to appetite." Oh, be careful. Really be careful about what you do when you're there and ushered into the \$10 million mansion. You know, some guy's got in Nellie Gail or Beverly Hills or Bel Air, be careful, Laguna Beach. Don't let your heart run wild. "Do not desire his delicacies, for they are deceptive food." Particularly by those who have acquired this life. Envy. "Do not toil to acquire wealth; be discerning enough to desist." And yet our whole society is built on that. Everything's built on that. "When your eye lights on it, it's gone, and suddenly it sprouts wings, flying like an eagle toward the heavens." Like Ecclesiastes 5, "Anyone who desires wealth will never be satisfied with wealth." Some might say, "Well, you should I never try to get a raise at work?" I'm not saying that, but I'm saying you're going to see the blessing of a raise much differently than the guy who's driven by envy to have the raise, because he keeps looking at the people in the better offices, in the better businesses, in the better corporations.

"Do not eat the bread of a man who is stingy; and do not desire his delicacies." Because there is a man who is stingy who will invite you to the dinner and you're going to have your heart go, "Well, wow, I'd like to have all this." "For he is like one who was inwardly calculating, 'Eat and drink!' he says to you, but his heart is not with you." He doesn't want you to consume his stuff. He doesn't want you to be looking at him now. He doesn't want you showing deference. He can't tell whether your flattery is really just you cloaking the dagger in your hand to take what he's got. Matter of fact, "You're going to end up vomiting up the morsels you've eaten, and waste your pleasant words." You'll have said things to try to ingratiate yourself to the rich guy and in reality, every man for himself because it's a competitive dog-eat dog, envy-driven, jealousy-driven world. And all I'm telling you, you've got to be careful.

Christ is our model. Did Christ care about this stuff? Did Paul? "Have this attitude in you, which was also in Christ Jesus. The existing form of God did not regard equality with God a thing to be grasped." How does that start? It starts with this. You ought to prefer each other above yourself. You ought to have the mind of Christ by doing what? By considering others as more significant than yourself. How does that work? Well, we'll see it in the counterattack. It works by the way I love them because here it is, here's a preview to part three, "Love does not envy." There's just no place for it. Christ never envied anybody. Some say, "Well, that's because he's the CEO of the universe." No, that's not why. He's modeling for us what it is to be a perfect human being. It's what we aspire for. And God can forgive the guilt of the mess that's done under the surface of the roots of the envy of your life. And I pray that right now



we're honest enough with him to say, "God, I've sinned." And we can do some spade work in the next two installments of our short series.

Let's pray. God, I know it's hard that any envy in our hearts that doesn't eventually spill out. It's not like we're carrying around this envy, this corrosive liquid in a thermos. It's in a saucepan and it's sitting on the passenger seat and we're driving around town. There's just no way this isn't going to spill out. So help us, please. It's something that we can keep secret until at least there are bumps in the driveway, until the walls start tilting over. Then we're going to blame it on something else. "Well, must be that terrible construction of that wall." God help us to know that the roots of our envy can be so damaging. And we need to see when there are quarrels and conflicts and friction and controversy, and when there's angst and frustration and suspicion and criticism and gossip, we need to say what is driving that? Am I an envious person? That at least as we assess the damage, may we get serious about paying the price of instilling and ensconcing the virtues that will protect us from having this being an enslaving, defiling sin of our hearts. May it be of us that our hearts are not defiled by the growing and unchecked sin of envy. Help us with this.

I pray in Jesus' name. Amen.