

“Dealing with Envy”
Philippians 1:15-18
(Preached at Trinity, August 14, 2016)

I'm supplying these notes for the benefit of busy pastors who may be engaged in bi-vocational work, feeling the pressure of preparing to preach twice on the Lord's Day while trying to balance full-time secular work as well as caring for their families. While the notes of another man are no substitute for personal study, I pray that these may aid in the process of preparing to preach.

Disclaimer: These are the actual notes I bring with me to the pulpit, which I follow loosely. They are not designed for publication. While I try to make every effort to give proper credit to my sources from the pulpit, adequate citations will sometimes be absent from my notes. If anyone feels their intellectual material has been used without adequate citation, please contact me and I'll make immediate correction giving credit.

1. Paul has been sharing his experience while in confinement at Rome. He is confined to rented quarters and chained to a Roman soldier at all times. Paul had the wonderful grace to look beyond his own circumstances and fix his eyes upon the Kingdom of Christ. In spite of his imprisonment he was continually filled with joy because of the advance of the Gospel and the strengthening of the brethren – **Verses 12-14**
2. Paul was rejoicing because in his imprisonment he has witnessed many being saved. Both Jew and Gentile. Many of the praetorian guard had professed faith in Christ. And these new converts were boldly sharing Christ with others, even at risk of their own arrest and imprisonment.
Philippians 1:14 NAU - "most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear."
 - a. The Book of Romans was written around AD 56. The Christian church was prospering in Rome.
Romans 1:8 NAU - "I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, because your faith is being proclaimed throughout the whole world."
 - b. The Book of Philippians was written from Rome around 62 AD. Already the flames of persecution were being kindled. Christian persecution became widespread during the reign of Nero between 64 and 68 AD.
 - c. The new converts under Paul were standing firm even in the face of rising opposition.
Philippians 1:14 NAU - "most of the brethren, trusting in the Lord because of my imprisonment, have far more courage to speak the word of God without fear."
 - d. William Hendriksen believed that a separate Jewish church was being established in Rome. The Church of Rome was largely a Gentile congregation. We don't have clear evidence, however, that these new believers weren't being incorporated into the existing church.
3. Paul makes a strange statement in **Verses 15-18**
Philippians 1:15 NAU - "Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from envy and strife, but some also from good will"
 - a. He is either speaking of these new converts spoken of in **Verse 12** or, more likely, the established preachers of the Church of Rome. He is speaking of the heralds of the Gospel.
 - b. It should be noted that there isn't a question regarding the accuracy of their message. They are preaching the true Gospel of Christ.
Philippians 1:18 NAU - "whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice"

4. Some were preaching in sincerity with a high respect for Paul. They knew Paul was appointed by God to preach the Gospel. They didn't feel at all threatened by Paul's presence.
5. Others, however, felt threatened by Paul. Paul brings up one of the terrible sins of the human heart—the sin of envy. Envy stirs up within us bitterness and hatred. It brings division, even in the closest of relationships. It causes strife in families. It can destroy churches.
6. Paul doesn't give us any details regarding the cause of the envy that some had directed towards him. Most likely there were some within the Church of Rome who felt threatened by the attention Paul was getting. We don't need to know the details in order to be instructed by it. The causes are always generally the same. And the cure is also universal. I want to direct our hearts towards this subject of envy this morning.

I. What is the cause of envy?

- A. The general cause is the pride of the human heart
 1. We naturally want all success, all happiness, all attention. We naturally want to be the greatest. When we perceive someone achieving what we have not we can become envious.
 - a. This was the cause of Cain killing Abel.
 - b. It was the cause of opposition to the leadership of Moses
 - c. It was the cause of Joseph's brothers selling him into slavery
 - d. It was the cause of the hatred of Jesus by the Jewish leaders.
Matthew 27:17-18 NAU - "So when the people gathered together, Pilate said to them, "Whom do you want me to release for you? Barabbas, or Jesus who is called Christ?"
¹⁸ For he knew that because of envy they had handed Him over."
 2. Envy can enter the heart of us all. We can see this spirit of envy and jealousy in the heart of the disciples of our Lord
Mark 9:33-34 NAU - "They came to Capernaum; and when He was in the house, He *began* to question them, "What were you discussing on the way?" ³⁴ But they kept silent, for on the way they had discussed with one another which *of them* was the greatest."
Luke 9:46-48 NAU - "An argument started among them as to which of them might be the greatest. ⁴⁷ But Jesus, knowing what they were thinking in their heart, took a child and stood him by His side, ⁴⁸ and said to them, "Whoever receives this child in My name receives Me, and whoever receives Me receives Him who sent Me; for the one who is least among all of you, this is the one who is great."
 3. The word translated "envy" here in **Verse 15** is φθόνος
 - a. The lexical definition is "*a state of ill will toward someone because of some real or presumed advantage experienced by such a person*"

- b. Sometimes it is result of covetousness – being envious of what someone else has.
Someone arrives at church in a new car that you can't have.
Someone takes a vacation that you can't take.
Someone has some success or achievement that you haven't achieved.
 - c. Most often it is just a matter of seeing others getting what we do not have.
- B. There were some in Rome who were envious of Paul
1. Paul is confined to his quarters, unable to move about. And yet he has a magnetic appeal. Many are coming to hear him. And God is blessing him with ministerial success.
 2. There were some who were envious of Paul. They weren't enjoying the following that Paul had. They weren't seeing the same Gospel success. Perhaps they had converts who were speaking highly of Paul, going to hear Paul. They were envious. Paul writes of them in **Verse 17** that they were preaching "out of selfish ambition rather than from pure motives"
 3. So, as they preached they sought to draw Paul's disciples to themselves. Perhaps they spoke negatively of Paul trying to ruin his reputation. People have always believed that they can build themselves up by tearing others down.
 4. These were Christians and Paul was a Christian and yet, there was a spirit of hostility and envy dividing them. Instead of seeking to encourage Paul in his imprisonment they were seeking to increase his distress
Philippians 1:17 NAU - "thinking to cause me distress in my imprisonment."
 - a. It sounds horrible. It sounds impossible. But the same is true today—Christians in the same church envious of one another. It may be a subtle spirit of competitiveness among them.
 - b. The envy can also be among churches. There are hundreds of churches in the same town, often competing with one another, trying to outdo one another, seeking to draw members from one another.

II. What is the cure for envy?

- A. The first cure for envy is having a Kingdom mind
1. As long as we maintain an earthly mind we will seek earthly things.
 - a. We will have earthly plans and earthly goals and earthly recognition. We will be frustrated with our goals are not met. And we will be frustrated when we don't receive the recognition we are sure we deserve.
 - b. When we are always longing for our share of the earthly pie we will envy those who have a larger piece of pie than we do.
 - c. And we must not fool ourselves into thinking our ambition is heavenly minded when our attention is actually focused on our own plans.

2. This was the problem with Paul's adversaries. They were doing Gospel work with an eye upon the earthly pie. They didn't have a Kingdom mind. All they could see is Paul was gaining more converts and more followers than they were.

a. They were gratified to see Paul's distress in prison because they saw it as a possibility to reduce his influence.

b. This is a most dangerous place for a Christian. It is a mind that is inconsistent with Christianity.

Romans 1:28-29 NAU - "And just as they did not see fit to acknowledge God any longer, God gave them over to a depraved mind, to do those things which are not proper, ²⁹ being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of envy, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips"

c. Envy flows forth from a worldly mind

1 John 2:15-17 NAU - "Do not love the world nor the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. ¹⁶ For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the boastful pride of life, is not from the Father, but is from the world. ¹⁷ The world is passing away, and *a/so* its lusts; but the one who does the will of God lives forever."

James 4:4 NAU - "You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God."

3. Paul had a Kingdom mind, a heart enflamed with Christ.

a. He had a single mind. He wanted to see the Gospel prosper upon the earth. He wanted to see the lost come to a knowledge of Christ and believers mature in their faith.

b. For Paul it wasn't an issue of who witnessed the increase as long as there was increase.

1 Corinthians 3:6-7 NAU - "I planted, Apollos watered, but God was causing the growth. ⁷ So then neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but God who causes the growth."

c. Even though the Roman believers were preaching with impure motives Paul was joyful that they were preaching

Philippians 1:18 NAU - "What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice"

d. There is no place for envy to take root in such a heart.

B. The second cure for envy is love.

1. Our highest and chief love is Christ. If we have Christ what more can there be? If we have Christ how can we be envious of others?

The cure for envy is to be immersed in Christ

2. Love for one another is the Christian mandate
John 13:34-35 NAU - "A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another, even as I have loved you, that you also love one another. ³⁵ "By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."
 3. Paul wrote that jealousy cannot survive in an environment of love
1 Corinthians 13:4 NAU - "Love is patient, love is kind *and* is not jealous"
 4. Love does not envy but rather rejoices in the blessings of others. Love rejoices when others are doing well. And love labors to help others do well, even at our own expense.
Philippians 2:3-4 NAU - "Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; ⁴ do not *merely* look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others."
 5. Paul demonstrated this wonderfully. He was a man of graciousness. He continually demonstrated patience and love, even towards those who treated him unkindly.
 - a. After Paul's second arrest in Rome most of the brethren deserted him. His response was that of graciousness, not of vindication.
2 Timothy 4:16 NAU - "At my first defense no one supported me, but all deserted me; may it not be counted against them."
 - b. We can hear this tone here. Paul returned their envy and mischief with grace and patience. Paul's great joy was the success of the Gospel, no matter from whose hands it came.
Philippians 1:18 NAU - "whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is proclaimed; and in this I rejoice. Yes, and I will rejoice,"
 - c. Rather than envy them Paul rejoiced over them.
 May God grant us this love. To rejoice over one another and desire our mutual good.
- C. A third cure for envy is a mind saturated with the Word of God.
1. The Word of God always directs our mind. It directs our thoughts. It shapes our conscience.
Psalms 119:11 NAU - "Your word I have treasured in my heart, That I may not sin against You."
1 Peter 2:1-3 NAU - "Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and envy and all slander, ² like newborn babies, long for the pure milk of the word, so that by it you may grow in respect to salvation, ³ if you have tasted the kindness of the Lord."
 2. A Christian may find envy in his thoughts but he finds it inconsistent with God's Word. He despises it, he's alarmed at it. He strives to gain control over it. He mortifies it.
Colossians 3:5 NAS - "Therefore consider the members of your earthly body as dead to immorality, impurity, passion, evil desire, and greed, which amounts to idolatry."

Conclusion:

1. All of this is done through the indwelling Holy Spirit.
Galatians 5:25-26 NAU - "If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. ²⁶
Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, envying one another."
2. Envy is ugly in the Christian. May God help us to guard our hearts. Only Christ can free us from craving that piece of the earthly pie. Only Christ can free us to rejoice in the Gospel—to rejoice when He is exalted.
3. May God protect us from hearts jealousy or envy. May He protect us from a competitive spirit and continually remind us that as Christians we are laboring for the same thing.