

Covetousness/ Envy

We all sometimes want what we don't have. We all sometimes envy someone else or what they have. Sometimes these feelings motivate us to push ourselves harder to achieve more. Sometimes this drive to want what we don't have or achieve what someone else has can become consuming, and take over our lives. Sometimes this can lead to being very materialistic and forgetting that God should be number one in our lives, not anything else. In this lesson we will explore what the Bible says about covetousness and envy.

Covetousness condemned

Exodus 20:17 “Thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's house, thou shalt not covet thy neighbour's wife, nor his manservant, nor his maidservant, nor his ox, nor his ass, nor any thing that is thy neighbour's.” and **Deuteronomy 5:21** “Neither shalt thou desire thy neighbour's wife, neither shalt thou covet thy neighbour's house, his field, or his manservant, or his maidservant, his ox, or his ass, or any thing that is thy neighbour's.” We can covet about anything from our neighbors family, to their belongings, as this verses point out so well. Coveting or envy of what another person has is not just the motivation to do better for yourself. It is to want to take away from someone else and build yourself up to be better than them. It is a lust for what is not yours. These feelings can often lead not only to Unchristian behaviors and attitudes, but also to put things before God, which is never acceptable to Him. Covetousness and envy can send one into a very dark place and consume one's life.

Habakkuk 2:9 “Woe to him that coveteth an evil covetousness to his house, that he may set his nest on high, that he may be delivered from the power of evil!” Deep covetous desires or feeling envy of someone or something will drive a person to have sinful thoughts. Sinful thoughts can then become sinful actions which break the laws of God and might also break the laws of man. How many criminal acts have been committed because of covetousness and envy? How many sinful actions have taken place because of covetousness and envy? If one feels covetousness or envy growing in them, it is time to pray to God for strength and reexamine your priorities. Do your priorities please God? If not, change them. If necessary, ask a fellow Christian for help rather than letting these feelings grow.

Mark 7:20-23 “And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man. For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts, adulteries, fornications, murders, Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, an evil eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness: All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.” Sin begins often in the mind. Sinful thoughts can lead to sinful actions. When one is having thoughts, they know are sinful, a Christian needs to pray for forgiveness and strength, and not allow those thoughts to go unchecked. Sinful thoughts unchecked will likely just grow and grow, and become worse and worse, until one acts on them. Once a sinful action is taken, it becomes easier to do it again and again. Stop the process of sin in its tracks, don't let it grow.

Luke 12:15 “And he said unto them, Take heed, and beware of covetousness: for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possessed.” The possession of things should not be a Christian's priority. Our life should be about getting to Heaven. God must be

first in our lives for us to get to Heaven, not how much money we can accumulate or how many possessions we can own. Covetousness and envy can cause us to put the material before the spiritual and cost us our souls.

Romans 1:29-32 “Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, maliciousness; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity; whisperers, Backbiters, haters of God, spiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, Without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful: Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.” Covetousness and envy are compared to murder and many other sins by Paul, because to God, all sin is on the same level. Also pointed out in this passage, is what sins such as covetousness and envy can do to one’s mind. When someone gets consumed by these and other sins, they can get to the point where they enjoy these sins, even though they know God does not approve. Once covetousness and envy, or any sin, for that matter becomes repetitive, it become a normal part of life and can be very difficult to stop. What a sad state for someone to let themselves get into.

Romans 13:9 “For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.” Again, in this passage we see covetousness condemned. We are commanded by God to, “love our neighbor as ourself,” how can we do that when we are full of covetousness or envy toward them?

Ephesians 5:1-5 “Be ye therefore followers of God, as dear children; And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour. But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints; Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks. For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.” A covetous person will not be in Heaven. To be a follower of God and walk in love like Christ did, we cannot be full of covetousness and envy. He showed us the path of love and sacrifice, not envy and covetousness. We must walk in Christ’s footsteps to gain entrance into Heaven. There is nothing sinful about having material possessions, but it is sinful to put them before God.

Colossians 3:5-6 “Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry: For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience” Covetousness is idolatry! Covetousness is to worship something, and put it before God. Perhaps, it is easy to see that bowing down before some statue and worshipping it is sinful, and it is. However, covetousness is the same thing, only the idol one is worshipping is money or some other material thing.

Hebrews 13:5 “Let your conversation be without covetousness; and be content with such things as ye have: for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.” A Christian needs a mindset of contentment, not a mindset of covetousness or envy. Being able to realize we are just using this life to get ready for Heaven, will help a Christian realize material possessions are just not that important. Material possessions can not get anyone into Heaven.

Envy is poisonous to the soul

Job 5:2 “For wrath killeth the foolish man, and envy slayeth the silly one.” and **Proverbs 27:4** “Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?” Envy, just like anger, can be a dangerous emotion, which can lead one to unchristian behavior.

Proverbs 14:30 “A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones.” Envy, like covetousness, can corrupt your life by rotting it, making it full of negative emotions. The core of our lives should be God. If God is not at our core, we will replace Him with something. God alone gives us the path to Heaven, should we be obedient to Him.

Matthew 27:17-18 “Therefore when they were gathered together, Pilate said unto them, Whom will ye that I release unto you? Barabbas, or Jesus which is called Christ? For he knew that for envy they had delivered him.” and **Mark 15:9-11** “But Pilate answered them, saying, Will ye that I release unto you the King of the Jews? For he knew that the chief priests had delivered him for envy. But the chief priests moved the people, that he should rather release Barabbas unto them.” Envy can cause us to do horrible things. The Jewish leaders envied Jesus because they feared they would lose their power. Look at what envy made them capable of doing. Envy can make any of us capable of doing sinful things we otherwise would not. If we let envy or covetousness rule our lives, they will lead us to dark and sinful places.

Acts 13:44-46 “And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God. But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you: but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.” When envy controls our lives, or covetous does, we miss out on good things in our lives because we can not see them. Paul was trying to help people obey Christ and be able to go to Heaven. The Jews filled with envy did not hear Paul’s message of salvation, and even tried to take it away from other people. Envy and covetous feelings make it difficult if not impossible to be a Christian. Is the thing we covet or the person we envy worth missing Heaven over?

Romans 13:13-14 “Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.” We can not walk in envy and be Christians, we must choose. Christ is the way to Heaven, envy is not.

1 Corinthians 13:4 “Charity suffereth long, *and* is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up” Envy and love are opposing forces. Jesus wants us to be filled with love

of our fellow man not envy. How can we care about others if we are filled with envy or covetousness?

Galatians 5:19-21 “Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, Envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.” Envy, like covetousness is sin. Envy is listed right beside other sinful behaviors like murder, wrath, and heresies which will cost us our souls. If we want to be Christians and go to Heaven, we must put away envy and covetousness from our lives.

Titus 3:3-7 “For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; Which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour; That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.” Envy, hate, and malice make it very difficult, if not impossible, to be the person God wants us to be. He has given us mercy and love, are we willing to accept it? If we are willing to follow Christ and obey Him, these things cannot rule our lives.

James 3:15-17 “This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.” Feelings of Envy, like feelings of covetousness, are not going to lead us to Heaven, but rather they will lead us into sin if we let them. Instead Christians need to fill themselves with wisdom from God like peace, gentleness, and mercy.

Christian Priorities

Matthew 6:33 “But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.” and **Colossians 3:1-2** “If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.” Christians must learn to put God and seeking His kingdom first in our lives. When we do, we will find envy and covetous feelings have no place in our lives.

Matthew 10:28 “And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” Christians must learn to prioritize taking care of their soul and getting it to Heaven. When we do, we understand envy and covetous feelings are not going to help us do that. The things of this world are temporary and our soul is eternal. If we want our soul to be in Heaven eternally, we have to have our priorities right with God.

Conclusion

God must be first in the lives of a Christian. So anytime we are driven by covetousness and envy we will put something else as first in our lives, and not God. This is sinful. We can all want more or try and achieve better, but never should that take precedence in our lives over God. Feelings of covetousness and envy we might all have to fight from time to time, so we must always remember that God comes first, and that all that really matters about this life is making sure we are ready to meet God.