

## “The Seven Deadly Sins: Invidia (Envy)”

Luke 12:13-21

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Luke 12:13-21

<sup>13</sup>Someone in the crowd said to him, “Teacher, tell my brother to divide the family inheritance with me.” <sup>14</sup>But he said to him, “Friend, who set me to be a judge or arbitrator over you?” <sup>15</sup>And he said to them, “Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.” <sup>16</sup>Then he told them a parable: “The land of a rich man produced abundantly. <sup>17</sup>And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ <sup>18</sup>Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. <sup>19</sup>And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ <sup>20</sup>But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ <sup>21</sup>So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

Prayer.

Ah, poor Othello;  
who wrongly believed  
his love - Desdemona -  
was sexually engaged  
in a lurid affair  
with his lieutenant, Cassio,  
in a flash of envy and jealousy  
smothers her in bed,  
only to later learn  
the affair was  
an invention in the mind  
of another of his officers,  
an ensign named Lago,  
who was envious of Cassio’s  
higher rank and favor.<sup>1</sup>  
That William Shakespeare  
really knew how to write  
a gripping story line.  
He digs deep

into the human emotion  
and exploits envy  
for all its worth.

Like greed,  
envy is one of the seven deadly sins,  
characterized by an insatiable desire.  
Envy is an emotion that occurs  
when a person lacks another’s  
perceived superior quality,  
achievement, or possession  
and desires it.<sup>2</sup>  
It may be easy to dismiss envy  
of its serious consequence  
based on the fact that it is an emotion;  
a spontaneous psychological response  
- often involuntary -  
rooted in feelings, perceptions and beliefs  
either real or imagined.

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<sup>2</sup> Parrott, W. G., & Smith, R. H. (1993).  
Distinguishing the experiences of envy and  
jealousy. *Journal of Personality and  
Social Psychology*, 64, 906-920.

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<sup>1</sup> With thanks to:  
<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Othello>

But, like the sin of wrath last Sunday,  
 this issue isn't whether you have it  
 - we all experience its spontaneous nature -  
 the issue is  
 what are you going to do to control it?  
 How does one prevent it,  
 which would be the best possible outcome,  
 or, if experienced,  
 recognize it and redirect it  
 before it becomes  
 homicidal or suicidal rage?  
 In Dante's work Purgatory  
 the punishment for the envious  
 is to have their eyes sewn shut with wire,  
 because they have gained sinful pleasure  
 from seeing others brought low.<sup>3</sup>  
 It is hard to be envious  
 of that which you can't perceive.

We are warned about envy  
 in the tenth of the ten commandments.  
 Yahweh, our God,  
 the God above all gods,  
 concludes his commands to Moses  
 and his chosen Hebrews  
 with this community principle:  
 You shall not covet your neighbor's house,  
 you shall not covet your neighbor's wife,  
 or male or female slave,  
 or ox, or donkey,  
 or anything that belongs to your neighbor.<sup>4</sup>  
 Our God establishes the standard  
 for moral and ethical behavior;  
 and as long as we all follow that standard  
 our community of faith  
 will live in peace and prosperity.  
 All it takes to destroy community  
 is for that one King David  
 to look over the fence,  
 see the sun bathing Bathsheba

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<sup>3</sup> With thanks to:  
[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven\\_deadly\\_sins](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Seven_deadly_sins)

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 20:17 (NRSV)

- he becomes envious of another man's  
 wife -  
 and he has to have her  
 so he arranges to have her husband, Uriah,  
 killed  
 that he may take the spoils.<sup>5</sup>  
 And you wondered where Shakespeare  
 got his ideas for his works?!

The core of envy  
 appears to be an upward social comparison;  
 which is to say,  
 comparing oneself to another  
 of greater status, position or wealth.  
 When we compare ourselves with others  
 - when we look at that car parked next to  
 ours  
 that cost a little bit more  
 or has a little bit more status -  
 we make the comparison  
 and our confidence erodes.  
 We want it  
 but we can't have it.  
 And we become envious.  
 I make this observation because  
 the first step to avoid or prevent  
 oneself from falling into the sinful state of  
 envy  
 is to consciously  
 intentionally  
 avoid comparisons.  
 If I don't compare  
 my little Honda Civic  
 with your Turbo Porsche  
 I will not become envious  
 of what you have.  
 I will remain content with my Civic.  
 When I'm not envious of what you have  
 then we have the potential to  
 have a healthy relationship  
 void of pretext,  
 empty of envy,  
 but filled with friendship  
 completed with God's love.

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<sup>5</sup> 2 Samuel 11

So, rule number one:  
don't compare yourself with others.

Many times  
this is easier said than done.  
I'm the first to admit it.  
Who hasn't compared themselves  
with someone else?  
my skills verses that of my co-worker?  
my income compared with  
my brother's or sister's income?  
my status in the community  
compared with my father's or mother's?  
Friday evening,  
I attended a beautiful concert at the shell  
(C-MAC performing arts center in  
Canandaigua)  
hosted by talented bluegrass musicians.  
I caught myself thinking  
"if only I could play a guitar like that."  
I was comparing my own meager abilities  
with accomplished musicians  
who may be the best in the land  
at what they do.  
Comparing myself.  
Cut it out!  
Just sit back and enjoy the music!

Which brings us to the second strategy  
to stop or contain the sin of envy:  
recognize it for what it is.  
Identify envy as nothing more than  
comparison.  
We look at the guy who wins the lottery  
and we make a comparison:  
"what's so special about him,"  
we think to ourselves.  
"I know those numbers  
just as good as anyone else.  
It should be me on that stage  
accepting that check."  
Wake up!  
You're making a comparison  
between the lucky one and yourself.  
God knows  
Moses knew,

David knew,  
Jesus knew,  
Shakespeare knew,  
that we fill our environment with  
comparisons  
when, instead,  
we should be filling our world  
with faith and with love.  
Recognizing envy simply  
as comparing the self with others  
will go a long way towards  
being mindful of the sin,  
so one can  
become intentional about dealing with it.  
When we recognize envy for what it is  
we realize that  
we are failing to trust God  
for what God has already done for us.  
When we want something better, more  
expensive,  
or to have our deepest desires met,  
we are forgetting the fact  
that God has already provided  
for our every need.  
We fail to trust and we take God for  
granted;  
not a good thing.

Being mindful of envy  
goes a long ways towards  
preventing envy from ever taking root.  
But what should we do once we become  
envious?  
What can we do once envy  
gets out of the box?

First off,  
give yourself a little credit  
for recognizing envy for what it is.  
Then, consider this strategy:  
use the feeling of envy  
to become a trigger  
for thankful thoughts.

This is how it works:  
"Look at that BMW.

Ooo-E I've love to have that car!"  
 Oops!  
 "I'm comparing that BMW to my car.  
 That's envy.  
 Instead of being envious of my neighbor's  
 care,  
 for what can I give thanks?"  
 we can ask ourselves.  
 I can thank God  
 that I was able to make my car payment  
 this month.  
 I can thank God  
 for the workers who labored to assemble  
 my car.  
 I can thank God  
 that I am able to afford a car.  
 I can thank God  
 that my car keeps me safe, and dry, and  
 warm.  
 I can thank God  
 for safety on the highway.  
 "Oh, my goodness!  
 There is so much to thank God about!"  
 we begin to realize  
 when we intentional change our hearts  
 towards God, and away from the flesh.  
 The only limit to our thanksgiving  
 is our imagination.

So, there we have it,  
 my beloved members and friends of Zion,  
 I've given you the tools today  
 to prevent or to contain the deadly sin of  
 envy.  
 Avoid comparisons;  
 it is the best strategy for prevention.  
 Recognize envy for what it is;  
 nothing more than desire to want  
 what someone else has  
 - a failure to trust  
 in the God that provides for you.  
 Finally,  
 if envy breaks through into your own life,  
 discipline yourself,  
 control yourself  
 with the simple technique of substitution:

use it as a trigger for praise and  
 thanksgiving.  
 I pray,  
 my beloved,  
 these words will serve you well  
 all your days.  
 Amen.