

Respectable Sins: Envy & Jealousy

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[0 : 00] Welcome here for this Sunday, November 14th. And as we continue in our series, Respectable Sins, let's refresh a few things that we've considered so far.

Over the past eight weeks, we've looked at the concept of sin. We've begun to look at specific sins, including, I'll give you the list, worry, discontentment, pride, selfishness, impatience and irritability, that was a two-for-one that week, anger and judgmentalism.

So remember, if you've missed any of those sermons, you can hear them on the website or through Braymarcast, which is our podcast on Spotify or Apple Podcasts.

So we've considered that sin can be defined as any failure to conform to the moral law of God in act, in attitude, or in nature.

One commentator I read in our series introduction suggested that at its root, sin is essentially selfish disregard. It's choosing what we want, what we desire, over anything else.

[1 : 15] It's seeking to fulfill our desires over the needs of another person, or the will of God in our lives. And sin, we've recognized, isn't something that we can brush off or minimize.

It has serious and eternal consequences. But as I say that statement, and everybody gets depressed, then I can recognize, we all need to recognize, that thankfully, our sin can be forgiven by God.

But only one way. By confessing our sin and by receiving forgiveness that was only made possible through the sacrifice of Jesus.

And as we come to the end of our series, everybody hears that, the end of our series, Respectable Sins, next week, I hope you've gained a better perspective in this series on some of the specific sins that we may commit.

And I hope that you've learned some new ways to identify and address them. I've had almost everyone come to me and say, yikes, that was a particularly bad one for me today.

[2 : 23] Guess what? I had to process all of these myself before I ever brought them to you. Process them myself, in my heart, in my prayers with God. Some of them are really, really struggles for me.

Some are not. And it may be the same for you. But we recognize that respectable sins, as we call them that, are the ones that we may tend to minimize.

We may tend to disregard. Or at the very least, we tolerate them. And I think people have recognized that to me as well. So this morning, we're going to recognize the sins of envy and jealousy together.

Another two for one, you might say. So we're going to consider three things this morning. We're going to define and clarify them. That's one thing.

We're going to identify what envy and jealousy reveal about us. And we're going to figure out how to recognize and repent of them. Does that sound okay?

[3 : 27] So I want to begin with a story this morning. You know me, the storyteller. Two shopkeepers were bitter rivals. Their stores were directly across the street from each other.

And they would spend each day in the back of each other's business. If one got a customer, he would smile in triumph at his rival. One night, an angel appeared to one of the shopkeepers in a dream and said, I will give you anything you ask.

See, unfortunately, this makes angels sound like genies. We know that's not right. But that's okay. We'll allow this. I'll give you anything you ask. But whatever you receive, your competitor will receive twice as much.

Would you be rich? You can be very rich. But he will be twice as wealthy. Do you wish to live a long and healthy life? You can.

But his life will be longer and healthier. What is your desire? Hmm, the man thought.

[4 : 31] He frowned, thought for a moment, and then said, Here is my request. Strike me blind in one eye.

I believe that short but powerful tale, aside from, as I said, being maybe theologically confused on its understanding of angels, illustrates that poisonous power of envy and jealousy.

So first, let's begin to seek to define and clarify these two sins. When you hear those words, envy and jealousy, are you wondering if I've wandered over into redundancy again?

Are you thinking, well, this is like talking about letters and cards, isn't it? Like they're both male, pretty much. But as I considered the sins of envy and jealousy, I began with that same perspective. Aren't they the same? Aren't those terms interchangeable? Those two words are often used that way. They're used interchangeably, I believe. And we consider them to often mean the same thing.

[5 : 42] When you're jealous of someone, isn't that called envy? Well, if you ask someone to describe a situation in which they felt jealous, they're just as likely to describe a situation of envy.

So things like, I wish I had my friend's good looks. Oh, if I had a dollar for every time I said that. Just kidding. We identify that as jealousy, but it's actually envy.

So jealousy might be, well, my girlfriend danced with an attractive guy, so now I'm jealous and I'm worried that she's going to go with him. So naturally, those two perspectives, right, that creates a sense that envy and jealousy are similar, but they're actually quite different.

I read a quote this week that helps to clarify this for us. Here's the quote. There's a distinction between jealousy and envy. To envy, here it is, to envy is to want something which belongs to another person.

In contrast, jealousy is the fear that something we possess will be taken away by someone else.

[6 : 55] See that distinction? Envy is wanting something that belongs to another person. Oh, I want that house. Oh, I want that Lamborghini. In contrast, jealousy is the fear that something we already have, just ignore the lights, they're still acting up, something that we have will be taken away.

So I have this, whether it's a relationship or a possession, and someone will take it away. So although jealousy can apply to our jobs, our possessions, our reputations, the word more often refers to the anxiety which comes when we're afraid that the affections of a loved one might be lost to a rival.

That's what most often we associate jealousy with. We fear that our mate, our spouse, perhaps even our children, will be lured away by some other person who, when compared to us, is somehow more attractive, more capable, more successful, any number of things.

So while I may envy someone for having a nicer car, more money, a bigger house, I am jealous of how someone talks to my wife, gives attention to my children that I may be suddenly realizing I didn't do, or that I'll lose something, a thing, that has value to me.

So here's another perspective that adds more dimension to the understanding. Jealousy is the fear that you will lose something of value to you, and envy is the anger you feel because someone else got what you wanted, or you felt you deserved.

[8 : 41] Is that helpful? So jealousy is fear, and envy is anger, based in fear, based in anger. But we can also recognize that, guess what, when you have one, you almost always have the other.

Jealousy is usually first, with envy trailing close behind. So I hope that's helpful. This may not surprise you.

Envy also means coveting. There's that big Old Testament word. Wanting something that doesn't belong to us, and can you recognize that's one of the top ten?

We talked about it in the opening of our series. There are top ten sins, and that is one of them that's identified for Moses. Exodus 20, verse 17, tells us, There it is, spelled out.

Envy or coveting, it's a slippery slope sin. Say that ten times. It's a slippery slope sin that can lead to so many others.

[10 : 10] If we want a physical object that doesn't belong to us, that could lead to stealing. If we want a person, in an unhealthy way, that can lead to lust, or even adultery.

If we crave a reputation, or an identity that isn't ours, or we don't refuse to take responsibility for something that we've done, that can lead to lying.

So envy is a serious issue, and I don't know, as I said at the beginning, is that something that you maybe struggle with, or perhaps you don't. But it's important to think about.

And jealousy, it stems from a sense of insecurity, a lack of trust of the people who are closest to you.

Have you ever thought about that? If you think your spouse, or someone that's close to you, is willing to choose someone over you, does that say as much about your lack of trust in that person, as it does about any sort of outside threat?

[11 : 17] I think it does. It stems from a sense of insecurity, or a lack of trust in the people who are closest to you. Or it may also come out of a fear of losing something that we currently have, as I said before.

It comes from a fear of loss, jealousy. So do we think so little of our connection with someone, or someone that we're deeply connected to, that we would think that they would choose someone else over us?

Doesn't that seem ridiculous? And yet, we go there in our minds, don't we? Our emotions get away from us. Are we so controlling, that we can't trust a loved one, to have a meaningful connection, or a relationship, hopefully not a romantic one, with someone else?

God bless Michelle, because she recognized early on in our relationship, that most of my closest friends are female. And it's been that way all my life.

It's because, she just says, it's because I listen better than the average guy. I am more connected to my emotions than the average guy. I get conversations with women better than most guys do.

[12 : 35] But, I recognize the fact that, she's okay with those relationships, because she trusts me. You see that? And I recognize that as a gift.

Or, do we have a possession that's so valuable to us, that we lose sight of its relatively limited, likely its limited value, or its objective value?

We're clinging to a thing, so hard, that we allow it to affect us. Our second point this morning, what do envy and jealousy reveal about us?

Well, we've touched a little bit on that here and there. But we need to recognize something. Hear this one. Envy and jealousy, I came to the conclusion, are really the only empty sins.

Let me explain what I mean by that. For nearly every other sin, we can recognize some momentary or fleeting form of satisfaction or pleasure.

[13 : 42] If you go through a list, you can recognize that there's instant gratification, some sort of benefit, air quotes again, but not with envy or jealousy.

Can you see that? Envy and jealousy are all about longing, but without satisfaction. They're about craving what we don't currently have, and may never have.

I'm not getting a Lamborghini anytime soon. Lord, may I have a Lamborghini? No. See, that's the answer. But can you see how that happens?

Something we may never have, we get caught up in craving. And worse than that, they're ultimately grounded in seeking to rob other people of their joy or their blessings.

That's pretty revealing to me. One quote, let me explain that a bit. One quote I read is that, envy is unhappiness at the pleasure of others, and pleasure, potentially, at the suffering of others.

[14 : 56] Yowch. That's pretty terrible, isn't it? When you're envying what someone else has, you basically wish they didn't have it.

That should be mine, not theirs. I don't want them to be happy and have that. And yet, how often have you heard someone confess that they are envious or jealous of someone else?

I don't think we hear it very often. Wow, I'm really jealous. I mean, we say it jokingly, right? I'm jealous of your hamburger. I should have made a better menu choice. But people don't really bear their souls when it comes to jealousy or envy that often, at least that I've heard.

And certainly not as often as it probably impacts our lives. I think it's probably, if you think about it, it affects you more than you may realize. And I think we can recognize as well that the world probably would say that envy and jealousy are healthy in some ways.

Because they keep us, in theory, seeking and reaching for success. Hear the world's voice there? If you're jealous or you're envious of something else, you'll protect what you have and you'll go after what you don't.

[16 : 15] But the Bible is clear, my friends. Envy and jealousy are sinful. But why?

Why are they sinful? Well, I want to suggest a few reasons. They put things and status before God and others.

Can you recognize that? They corrupt our priorities. And as I said before, they also reflect that we want what we want, even if it comes at the expense of someone else.

They weigh things, envy and jealousy weigh things by earthly comparisons and earthly value. More, bigger, stronger, better, all those adjectives are worldly adjectives.

And the Bible reveals to us over and over that those priorities have no place in the kingdom of God. No place. That is, here's a caveat, that is unless it's more of God.

[17 : 33] A better relationship with God. Serving God more. That's what we can be seeking. So I believe envy and jealousy, this is hard to hear, may be signs of an ungrateful and greedy heart.

I've talked before about symptoms versus the root cause. And they, envy and jealousy, are symptoms for sure. They're signs, I believe, that we've drifted away from loving God and loving others before ourselves.

Proverbs 14, verse 30 says, a heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy, hear this quote, but envy rots the bones.

Wow. That's an image, isn't it? But it's so revealing and true as I read that because envy personally robs us of peace.

It personally robs us of joy. But more than that, we're not envious or jealous of other people in a vacuum. Can you recognize that?

[18 : 52] The misery of those sins splashes over onto other people in our lives. And as Christians, our envious or jealous spirit can literally rot the bones of a larger body of believers.

Natalie Statz Rice, author I read this week, says this, Envy can be a destructive emotion both mentally and physically.

Envious people tend to feel hostile, resentful, angry, and irritable. So I would pause here and say if you recognize those tendencies in you, they may be signs of an envious heart.

Such individuals, Rice says, are less likely to feel grateful about their positive traits and circumstances. Worried about what you're not or what you don't have versus what you have.

She continues, Envy is also related to depression, anxiety, the development of prejudice, and personal unhappiness.

[20 : 09] Not surprisingly, these negative mental states can impact physical health as well. Envious people can feel stressed and overwhelmed.

Our third point this morning, so having recognized all of this, how can we then recognize and repent of envy and jealousy in our lives?

Well, in Romans 12, verse 15, the Apostle Paul gives us a simple but powerful directive that may be familiar to you. Rejoice with those who rejoice, Paul says.

Mourn with those. I'm still mourning from yesterday. Mourn with those who mourn.

Friends, envy and jealousy can take rejoicing out of our circumstances.

[21 : 17] Envy prevents us from rejoicing with someone for the blessings that they have received in their lives simply because we may not have received the same blessings in our own.

Jealousy prevents us from rejoicing with those we love most in our lives as they experience new connections with other people that may not involve us.

Or as we're afraid to lose them or something else that really, in the grand scheme of things, is temporary. Even worse, can you recognize that when you're envious or jealous of someone else, you may actually begin to rejoice when they mourn.

Remember that shopkeeper story. Rejoicing when someone else mourns. Envy and jealousy also gain power from craving and coveting what we don't have and being fearful of losing the things that we have.

Can you recognize that as well? Can you recognize the many benefits that God has given you in your life? The many blessings that he has showered on you.

[22 : 42] The talents and the skills that you have. The things that he has provided when you least expected them. The relationships and connections that have blessed you and encouraged you along the way.

My friends, seek to let go of the things that are not in your life and focus on the many things that you can recognize that are.

Don't let envy and jealousy rot your bones and drain the joy from your life. I believe that we can all recognize that envy, that craving and coveting what we don't have leads to a state of constant agitation and anxiety.

Maybe you can recognize it in your own life. I can in mine. The fear that jealousy brings, the fear of losing someone that we value leads to value the having rather than the enjoyment of the blessing itself.

Does that make sense? And as I said before, even if a blessing or a relationship is for a short time, in wishing it was longer, in wishing it was better or more, we miss the joy and the moment.

[24 : 05] Would you like some practical tips this morning? It's always good in a sermon, isn't it? Many people in our church family right now are grieving and mourning in these days.

Pray for them. Seek to comfort them. Mourn with them. And in your life, turn the focus as much as you can from you back to God.

Thanking Him for what you have and for all that He has given. Perhaps you've seen the, I don't know, I've seen it in bumper stickers and on mugs and things like that, but imagine waking up tomorrow with only the things that you thanked God for yesterday or today.

It's a good perspective. Confess your envious and jealous thoughts and actions to God. He knows about them already. Confess them to Him.

Repent of them. Even minute by minute if necessary. Be grateful for all the unique and wonderful ways God has blessed your life.

[25 : 21] And ask Him to remind you of those blessings. Sometimes we get so busy that we, I mean, it's such a cliché, but we stop, forget to stop and smell the roses. We forget to stop and enjoy God winking at us.

He does it all the time. I phoned to talk to someone who had lost a loved one about a year ago and just some of the things that I said to her, she stopped and began to cry and she said, I needed to hear that.

It didn't come from me. It came from God through me to her. And she said, God just winked at me and I said, what a great way to say it. Think about the times that God winks at you in your life to remind you that He's there and that He cares.

As we've looked through the respectable sins together over these weeks, I want us to say, and we've done this every Sunday, I want us to say the words of 1 John 1, 9 together each week.

Are you ready? If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just. He will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.

[26 : 35] Amen.