

Envy & Jealousy

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Introduction

General Definitions

The New Bible Dictionary defines “envy” as “a grudging regard for the advantages seen to be enjoyed by others.” Alternatively, “jealousy” is defined as “an exclusive single-mindedness of emotion which may be morally blameworthy or praiseworthy depending on whether the object of the jealousy is the self or some cause beyond the self.”ⁱ

The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia says, “Jealousy is the intense emotion aroused by the infringement of one’s right (or presumed right) to exclusive possession or loyalty.”ⁱⁱ The root idea of both the Greek and the Hebrew words translated “jealousy” is “warmth” or “heat” or “a burning” (Heb. 10:27).

Hebrews 10:27 (NASB95) — 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the ***fury** of a fire which will consume the adversaries.

How does one distinguish envy from jealousy? Envy is focused outward; jealousy is focused inward. W.E. Vine says, “envy desires to deprive another of what he has, jealousy desires to have the same or the same sort of thing for itself.”ⁱⁱⁱ According to the *New Bible Dictionary*, “Jealousy makes us fear to lose what we possess; envy creates sorrow that others have what we have not.” Alternatively, it has been said, “We are jealous of our own; we are envious of another man’s possessions. Jealousy fears to lose what it has; envy is pained at seeing another have.”^{iv}

The Noun Ζῆλος

Thomas defines ζῆλος [zēlos] as probably from *zeō* [to boil, be hot], meaning “zeal, jealousy” [2205b].

BDAG say it refers to “(1) intense positive interest in something, zeal, ardor, marked by a sense of dedication; (2) intense negative feelings over another’s achievements or success, jealousy, envy.”

This word occurs 15x in the NT (John 2:17; Acts 5:17; 13:45; Rom. 10:2; 13:13; 1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 7:7; 9:2; 11:2; 12:20; Gal. 5:20; Phil. 3:6; Heb. 10:27; James 3:14, 16).

John 2:17 (NASB95) — 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, “***ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.**”

*Acts 5:17 (NASB95) — 17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with ***jealousy**.*

*Acts 13:45 (NASB95) — 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with ***jealousy** and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.*

*Romans 10:2 (NASB95) — 2 For I testify about them that they have a ***zeal** for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.*

*Romans 13:13 (NASB95) — 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and ***jealousy**.*

*1 Corinthians 3:3 (NASB95) — 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is ***jealousy** and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?*

*2 Corinthians 7:7 (NASB95) — 7 and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your ***zeal** for me; so that I rejoiced even more.*

*2 Corinthians 9:2 (NASB95) — 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your ***zeal** has stirred up most of them.*

*2 Corinthians 11:2 (NASB95) — 2 For I am jealous [#2206] for you with a godly ***jealousy**; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.*

*2 Corinthians 12:20 (NASB95) — 20 For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, ***jealousy**, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;*

*Galatians 5:20 (NASB95) — 20 idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, ***jealousy**, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions,*

*Philippians 3:6 (NASB95) — 6 as to ***zeal**, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.*

*Hebrews 10:27 (NASB95) — 27 but a terrifying expectation of judgment and the ***fury** of a fire which will consume the adversaries.*

*James 3:14 (NASB95) — 14 But if you have bitter ***jealousy** and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.*

*James 3:16 (NASB95) — 16 For where ***jealousy** and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.*

The Verb Zēloō

Thomas defines ζηλόω [zēloō] as derived from zēlos [zeal, jealousy], meaning “to be jealous” [2206].

BDAG say it means “(1) to be positively and intensely interested in something, strive, desire, exert oneself earnestly, be dedicated; (2) to have intense negative feelings over another’s achievements or success, be filled with jealousy, envy.”

This word occurs 10x in the NT (Acts 7:9; 17:5; 1 Cor. 12:31; 13:4; 14:1; 2 Cor. 11:2; Gal. 4:17 [2x], 18; James 4:2).

*Acts 7:9 (NASB95) — 9 “The patriarchs became ***jealous** of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him,*

*Acts 17:5 (NASB95) — 5 But the Jews, ***becoming *jealous** and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.*

*1 Corinthians 12:31 (NASB95) — 31 But ***earnestly *desire** the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.*

*1 Corinthians 13:4 (NASB95) — 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not ***jealous**; love does not brag and is not arrogant,*

*1 Corinthians 14:1 (NASB95) — 1 Pursue love, yet ***desire *earnestly** spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.*

*2 Corinthians 11:2 (NASB95) — 2 For I ***am *jealous** for you with a godly jealousy [#2205b]; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.*

*Galatians 4:17 (NASB95) — 17 They ***eagerly *seek** you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will ***seek** them.*

*Galatians 4:18 (NASB95) — 18 But it is good always to be ***eagerly *sought** in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.*

*James 4:2 (NASB95) — 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are ***envious** and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.*

The Verb Parazēloō

Thomas defines παραζηλόω [parazēloō] as a compound of *para* [from beside, by the side of, by, beside] and *zēloō* [to be jealous], meaning “to provoke to jealousy” [3863].

BDAG say it means “to provoke to jealousy, make jealous.”

This word occurs 4x in the NT (Rom. 10:19; 11:11, 13-14; 1 Cor. 10:22).

*Romans 10:19 (NASB95) — 19 But I say, surely Israel did not know, did they? First Moses says, “I will ***make** you ***jealous** by that which is not a nation, By a nation without understanding will I anger you.”*

*Romans 11:11 (NASB95) — 11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, **to *make** them ***jealous**.*

*Romans 11:13-14 (NASB95) — 13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might ***move to *jealousy** my fellow countrymen and save some of them.*

*1 Corinthians 10:22 (NASB95) — 22 Or do we ***provoke** the Lord **to *jealousy**? We are not stronger than He, are we?*

The Noun Phthonos

Thomas defines φθόνος [phthonos] as “envy” [5355].

BDAG say it refers to “envy, jealousy.”

This word occurs 9x in the NT (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10; Rom. 1:29; Gal. 5:21; Phil. 1:15; 1 Tim. 6:4; Titus 3:3; James 4:5; 1 Pet. 2:1).

*Matthew 27:18 (NASB95) — 18 For he knew that because of ***envy** they had handed Him over.*

*Mark 15:10 (NASB95) — 10 For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of ***envy**.*

*Romans 1:29 (NASB95) — 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of ***envy**, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,*

*Galatians 5:21 (NASB95) — 21 ***envying**, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*Philippians 1:15 (NASB95) — 15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from ***envy** and strife, but some also from good will;*

*1 Timothy 6:4 (NASB95) — 4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise ***envy**, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,*

*Titus 3:3 (NASB95) — 3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and *envy, hateful, hating one another.*

*James 4:5 (NASB95) — 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He *jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?*

*1 Peter 2:1 (NASB95) — 1 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and *envy and all slander,*

The Verb Phthoneō

Thomas defines φθονέω [phthoneō] as derived from *phthonos* [envy], meaning “to envy” [5354].

BDAG say it means “to envy, be jealous.”

This word occurs 1x in the NT (Gal. 5:26).

*Galatians 5:26 (NASB95) — 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, *envying one another.*

Positive Characteristics

Of Deity

These words collectively identify positive characteristics of deity, either of Jesus Christ, who exhibited a consuming zeal for God’s house (John 2:17), or the Godhead, in general, who demands our exclusive loyalty (1 Cor. 10:22; 2 Cor. 11:2; James 4:5).

*John 2:17 (NASB95) — 17 His disciples remembered that it was written, “*ZEAL FOR YOUR HOUSE WILL CONSUME ME.”*

*1 Corinthians 10:22 (NASB95) — 22 Or do we *provoke the Lord to *jealousy? We are not stronger than He, are we?*

*2 Corinthians 11:2 (NASB95) — 2 For I *am *jealous [#2206] for you with a godly *jealousy [#2205b]; for I betrothed you to one husband, so that to Christ I might present you as a pure virgin.*

*James 4:5 (NASB95) — 5 Or do you think that the Scripture speaks to no purpose: “He *jealously desires the Spirit which He has made to dwell in us”?*

Of Humanity

They also reference positive characteristics of humanity, both of Jews - in a qualified sense (Rom. 10:2; Phil. 3:6), and Christians - in a commendable sense (1 Cor. 12:31; 14:1; 2 Cor. 7:7; 9:2).

*Romans 10:2 (NASB95) — 2 For I testify about them that they have a ***zeal** for God, but not in accordance with knowledge.*

*Philippians 3:6 (NASB95) — 6 as to ***zeal**, a persecutor of the church; as to the righteousness which is in the Law, found blameless.*

*1 Corinthians 12:31 (NASB95) — 31 But ***earnestly *desire** the greater gifts. And I show you a still more excellent way.*

*1 Corinthians 14:1 (NASB95) — 1 Pursue love, yet ***desire *earnestly** spiritual gifts, but especially that you may prophesy.*

*2 Corinthians 7:7 (NASB95) — 7 and not only by his coming, but also by the comfort with which he was comforted in you, as he reported to us your longing, your mourning, your ***zeal** for me; so that I rejoiced even more.*

*2 Corinthians 9:2 (NASB95) — 2 for I know your readiness, of which I boast about you to the Macedonians, namely, that Achaia has been prepared since last year, and your ***zeal** has stirred up most of them.*

Negative Characteristics

Sinful Attitudes

The New Testament repeatedly warns against the soul-destroying sins of envy and jealousy (Rom. 13:13; 1 Cor. 13:4; Gal. 5:20; 5:21; 5:26; James 3:14; 3:16; 1 Pet. 2:1).

*Romans 13:13 (NASB95) — 13 Let us behave properly as in the day, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual promiscuity and sensuality, not in strife and ***jealousy**.*

*1 Corinthians 13:4 (NASB95) — 4 Love is patient, love is kind and is not ***jealous**; love does not brag and is not arrogant,*

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*Galatians 5:21 (NASB95) — 21 ***envying**, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God.*

*Galatians 5:26 (NASB95) — 26 Let us not become boastful, challenging one another, *envying one another.*

*James 3:14 (NASB95) — 14 But if you have bitter *jealousy and selfish ambition in your heart, do not be arrogant and so lie against the truth.*

*James 3:16 (NASB95) — 16 For where *jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every evil thing.*

*1 Peter 2:1 (NASB95) — 1 Therefore, putting aside all malice and all deceit and hypocrisy and *envy and all slander,*

Sinful Examples

Sacred Scripture provides examples of those who evidenced envy and jealousy, including:

The Patriarchs, who sold Joseph into slavery (Acts 7:9).

*Acts 7:9 (NASB95) — 9 “The patriarchs became *jealous of Joseph and sold him into Egypt. Yet God was with him,*

Disciples of Christ, who are selfishly and sinfully motivated (1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Phil. 1:15; James 4:2).

*1 Corinthians 3:3 (NASB95) — 3 for you are still fleshly. For since there is *jealousy and strife among you, are you not fleshly, and are you not walking like mere men?*

*2 Corinthians 12:20 (NASB95) — 20 For I am afraid that perhaps when I come I may find you to be not what I wish and may be found by you to be not what you wish; that perhaps there will be strife, *jealousy, angry tempers, disputes, slanders, gossip, arrogance, disturbances;*

*Philippians 1:15 (NASB95) — 15 Some, to be sure, are preaching Christ even from *envy and strife, but some also from good will;*

*James 4:2 (NASB95) — 2 You lust and do not have; so you commit murder. You are *envious and cannot obtain; so you fight and quarrel. You do not have because you do not ask.*

False teachers, who exhibit a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words (1 Tim. 6:4).

*1 Timothy 6:4 (NASB95) — 4 he is conceited and understands nothing; but he has a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words, out of which arise *envy, strife, abusive language, evil suspicions,*

The Jews, regarding the person of Jesus Christ (Matt. 27:18; Mark 15:10) and the preaching of the Gospel (Acts 5:17; 13:45; 17:5; Rom. 10:19; 11:11; 11:13-14).

*Matthew 27:18 (NASB95) — 18 For he knew that because of ***envy** they had handed Him over.*

*Mark 15:10 (NASB95) — 10 For he was aware that the chief priests had handed Him over because of ***envy**.*

*Acts 5:17 (NASB95) — 17 But the high priest rose up, along with all his associates (that is the sect of the Sadducees), and they were filled with ***jealousy**.*

*Acts 13:45 (NASB95) — 45 But when the Jews saw the crowds, they were filled with ***jealousy** and began contradicting the things spoken by Paul, and were blaspheming.*

*Acts 17:5 (NASB95) — 5 But the Jews, ***becoming *jealous** and taking along some wicked men from the market place, formed a mob and set the city in an uproar; and attacking the house of Jason, they were seeking to bring them out to the people.*

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*Romans 11:11 (NASB95) — 11 I say then, they did not stumble so as to fall, did they? May it never be! But by their transgression salvation has come to the Gentiles, **to *make** them ***jealous**.*

*Romans 11:13-14 (NASB95) — 13 But I am speaking to you who are Gentiles. Inasmuch then as I am an apostle of Gentiles, I magnify my ministry, 14 if somehow I might ***move** **to *jealousy** my fellow countrymen and save some of them.*

In a related sense, consider the example of the Judaizers regarding Gentile converts (Gal. 4:17, 18).

*Galatians 4:17 (NASB95) — 17 They ***eagerly *seek** you, not commendably, but they wish to shut you out so that you will ***seek** them.*

*Galatians 4:18 (NASB95) — 18 But it is good always to be ***eagerly *sought** in a commendable manner, and not only when I am present with you.*

Envy and jealousy are also characteristic of sinners in general (Rom. 1:29; Titus 3:3).

*Romans 1:29 (NASB95) — 29 being filled with all unrighteousness, wickedness, greed, evil; full of ***envy**, murder, strife, deceit, malice; they are gossips,*

*Titus 3:3 (NASB95) — 3 For we also once were foolish ourselves, disobedient, deceived, enslaved to various lusts and pleasures, spending our life in malice and ***envy**, hateful, hating one another.*

Conclusion

Let us avoid the sinful characteristics of envy and jealousy, while assimilating the positive concepts into our daily walk.

ⁱ *New Bible Dictionary, Third Edition*, (Leicester, England; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1996), s.v. “Envy.”

ⁱⁱ *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia, Revised*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1988, 2002), s.v. “Jealousy.”

ⁱⁱⁱ *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. “PHTHONOS” (G5355).

^{iv} *Crabb’s English Synonyms*; quoted by *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, (1915), s.v. “Envy.”