

Envy & Jealousy

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7/10/2011

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).

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 Zēlos Thomas defines ζήλος [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).

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).

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).

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).

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).

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).

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).

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).

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

- The Patriarchs, who sold Joseph into slavery (Acts 7:9).
- Disciples of Christ, who are selfishly and sinfully motivated (1 Cor. 3:3; 2 Cor. 12:20; Phil. 1:15; James 4:2).
- False teachers, who exhibit a morbid interest in controversial questions and disputes about words (1 Tim. 6:4).
- 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).
- In a related sense, consider the example of the Judaizers regarding Gentile converts (Gal. 4:17, 18).
- Envy and jealousy are also characteristic of sinners in general (Rom. 1:29; Titus 3:3).

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.”