

GUARD YOUR HEART AGAINST ENVY AND HER EVIL SISTERS

Introduction

Are you acquainted with envy and her evil sisters: jealousy and covetousness? Let me identify them for you: Covetousness is the strong, life-dominating desire for those things that are the exclusive possession of another person (such as one's wife or personal property.) Envy is the desire to be in the position of another person because of what he possesses or because of who he is. Jealousy is the desire for the hurt or misfortune of another person because of what they possess or because of who they are.

Some years ago the spotlight of public attention was focused on a young woman who was well acquainted with all three of these evil sisters, her name was Tanya Harding. Tanya Harding was a figure skater who coveted the title and the wealth of her rival and reigning figure skating queen, Nancy Kerrigan. Tanya Harding envied the glamorous position Nancy Kerrigan occupied. Tanya Harding actually sought to do harm to her rival, hiring a thug to strike Nancy on the knee with a crowbar and hopefully put her out of the Olympic competition.

Maybe you, too, are acquainted with one or more of these three evil sisters. Do you have a strong, even life-dominating, desire for those things that are the exclusive possession of your neighbor? If so, you are acquainted with covetousness. Do you have a strong, even life-dominating desire to exchange places with your neighbor because of what he possesses or because of who he is (he may be a great athlete, a successful businessman, or an influential leader)? If so, you are acquainted with envy. Do you have the desire to see hurt or misfortune befall your neighbor because of what she possesses or because of who she is (she may be an attractive cheerleader, or a beautiful homecoming queen, or a popular young woman who is the center of attention)? If so, you are acquainted with jealousy.

Our next topical study from the Book of Proverbs focuses our attention on these three evil sisters: covetousness, envy and jealousy. Whenever you see them coming, be sure to Guard Your Heart!

I. Guard Your Heart against Envy and Her Evil Sisters, Because They are Destructive Desires (Proverbs 14:30; Proverbs 27:20; Proverbs 27:4; Proverbs 24:1-2)

A tranquil heart gives health to the body, but envy rots the bones. (Prov. 14:30)

"A tranquil heart" (a heart that is at peace, a heart that is content) brings health to the body; but *"envy"* is like a cancer that eats into the very bones until the life is destroyed. Envy will make your life miserable: you will waste your time wishing

for what the other person has, ... weeping over what you do not have, ... never appreciating what God has given you and using what He has given you in His service and for His glory. You can never satisfy envy; the more you feed it, the more it demands until it consumes you: it will *“rot the bones.”*

Sheol and Abaddon are never satisfied, and the eyes of a man are never satisfied. (Prov. 27:20)

The grave (*Sheol*) and the place of the dead (*Abaddon*) never cease to claim more victims. They never say, “We are full! Don’t send us any more people!” On the contrary, generation after generation continue to be claimed by death and go to the grave. Note Habbakuk 2:5, where the Assyrian king is compared to Sheol whose appetite and desire cannot be satisfied: *“he is as greedy as Sheol and like death is never satisfied, but gathers to himself all nations and takes captive all the peoples.”* Here in Proverbs 27:20 envy and covetousness are likewise compared to Sheol because of their insatiable appetite for more.

The covetous heart of man is never satisfied, it always wants more. It is like a thirsty man who seeks to quench his thirst with salt water, only to succeed in increasing his thirst and never being able to find satisfaction. Salt water is not the solution for quenching the thirst of a thirsty man, not even a whole ocean full—he is dipping into the wrong well. Ecclesiastes 5:10 applies this insatiable quality of covetousness to wealth: *“Whoever loves money never has enough money; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income. This, too, is meaningless.”*

In contrast to coveting the things of this present world, as Christians, we are instructed to “covet” the things of God: *“Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness; for they shall be filled”* (Matt. 5:6.) May we join the Psalmist in his prayer: *“Satisfy us in the morning with your lovingkindness, so that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days”* (Psl. 90:14.)

Anger is cruel and fury is overwhelming, but who is able to stand before jealousy? (Prov. 27:4)

Outbursts of wrath and anger are compared to the roaring waves of the ocean or the awesome power of a torrential flood. But even more powerful and devastating than those waves of wrath and anger are the tidal waves of jealousy.

Why?

Anger and wrath may be appeased by the confession of our wrongdoing against our neighbor, by seeking his forgiveness, and by restitution or rectifying the wrong done. But what can appease jealousy? Jealousy desires the destruction of the other person not because of what wrong they have done, but simply because of who they are or what they rightfully possess. The missionary/author, Elizabeth Elliot, tells of a case of jealousy she experienced against her own person: When a

fellow missionary was habitually cold and distant towards her, she inquired of the LORD as to what was the cause. The LORD pointed Elizabeth to passages of Scripture on the topic of jealousy. Elizabeth found that there was nothing she could do to win that person's friendship, because the cause of the problem was jealousy.

Sinful jealousy can never be appeased. If it is allowed to express itself, it will seek its satisfaction in the destruction of that person who is the object of its fury. It must be confessed, renounced, and turned over to Christ. Let take to heart the warning the Apostle Paul gives to the churches of Galatia concerning the works of the old sinful nature:

*... the works of the sinful nature are well known, such as: sexual immorality, moral impurity, debauchery, ²⁰idolatry, witchcraft, hatreds, discord, **jealousy**, fits of rage, selfish ambition, dissensions, factions, ²¹envy, drunkenness, orgies, and other such things. I warn you again, just as I previously warned you, that **those who practice such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.** (Gal. 5:19-21)*

Do not be envious of evil men, neither desire to be with them; ²for their hearts plot violence, and their lips speak about mischief. (Prov. 24:1-2)

What might cause us to be envious of evil men and desire to be with them? It would be their quick and easy money, the vast amount of wealth they acquire, their glamorous and luxurious lifestyle, the adventure and thrill of living beyond the bounds of the law. Note the tempting promise the wicked offer to the young man in Proverbs 1:13; *"We shall get all sorts of valuable things, we shall fill our houses with plunder."*

Why does our heavenly Father warn us against envying such men? He does so because they are evil: *"their hearts plot violence [or, "their hearts study oppression"], and their lips speak about mischief."* They make a study of oppression and their conversation, which reveals their mind and heart, is pre-occupied with mischief. Furthermore, He warns us against envying such men because they will finally meet with the judgment of God: *"Do not fret because of evildoers or be envious of the wicked; ²⁰for there is no future for the evil man and the lamp of the wicked will be snuffed out"* (Prov. 24:19-20.)

Proverbs warns us to Guard our Hearts against Envy and Her Evil Sisters, Jealousy and Covetousness, because they are Destructive Desires. They are destructive because they are evil. They can destroy your relationship with God. Envy is an evil desire that tempts you to transform yourself into someone else's image with the hope of personal fulfillment ("I wish I could be in Joe's place, he's such a successful businessman. If I were in his place then I would be happy and fulfilled.") As Christians, we are supposed to become transformed into Christ's likeness for the glory of God and for true, God-ordained fulfillment. Covetousness

is an evil desire, causing you to put material possessions in the place of pre-eminence reserved for God alone, and causing you to seek your fulfillment in such things rather than in God.

These desires can also lead you into destructive relationships with men. Jealousy is an evil desire, causing us to seek our neighbor's harm, instead of his good. Covetousness is an evil desire that may tempt us to seek out evil companionships, as Proverbs 24:1-2 indicated.

II. Guard Your Heart against Envy and Her Evil Sisters, By Pursuing the Godly Alternatives (Proverbs 14:30; Proverbs 23:17-18; Proverbs 21:26)

A tranquil heart gives health to the body, but envy rots the bones. (Prov. 14:30)

A heart that is at peace, a heart that is content, brings life and health to the body. Consider what the Word of God says about contentment:

But godliness with contentment is great gain; ⁷for we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. (1 Tim. 6:6-8)

Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, "Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you." (Heb. 13:5)

Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of Jehovah all day long; ¹⁸for surely there is a future for you and your hope will not be cut off. (Prov. 23:17-18)

Far from envying the wicked and their temporary gains, we are to lead a God-fearing life, knowing that there shall come a sure and eternal reward. The Word of God counsels us, as Christians, to be content in the present and confident of the future:

Jehovah God is a sun and a shield. Jehovah will give grace and glory; no good thing will he withhold from those who walk uprightly. ¹²O Jehovah of hosts, blessed is the man that trusts in you. (Psl. 84:11b-12)

The Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are children of God. ¹⁷Now if we are children then we are heirs—heirs of God and co-heirs with Christ, if indeed we share in his sufferings in order that we may also share in his glory. ¹⁸I consider that our present sufferings are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will be revealed in us. (Rom. 8:16-18)

... the word of Jehovah came to Abram in a vision, saying, Fear not, Abram, I am your shield, and your reward shall be exceedingly great. (Gen. 15:1)

There is a man who covets greedily all day long; but the righteous gives and does not hold back. (Prov. 21:26)

A great contrast to those three wicked sisters of envy, jealousy and covetousness is the righteous attribute of generosity. We are to emulate the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ: *“you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich”* (2 Cor. 8:9.)

One great remedy by which to combat those three evil desires of envy, jealousy and covetousness is the practice of generosity. Speaking to the rich young ruler, the Lord Jesus counseled him,

If you want to be perfect, go, sell your possessions and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me. ²²When the young man heard this, he went away sorrowful, because he had great wealth. (Matt. 19:21-22)

Note that the reason Jesus insisted that this young man sell all his possessions and give the proceeds to the poor, is because his possessions had become his idol, he coveted them and loved them more than God.

We are commanded to remember the words of our Lord Jesus as they are recorded in Acts 20:35, *“It is more blessed to give than to receive.”* As we obey His counsel and example we shall experience its truth.

Proverbs warns us to Guard our Hearts against Envy and Her Evil Sisters, Jealousy and Covetousness, and we may do so by Pursuing the Godly Alternatives: 1) Contentment with regard to this present life; 2) Confidence with regard to the life to come; and 3) Generosity with regard to God’s gracious blessings entrusted to us.

Conclusion

Tanya Harding was well acquainted with those three evil sisters of envy, jealousy and covetousness. She walked hand in hand with them as they led her down a tragic road. As Christians, let us break off all association with those three evil desires and become well acquainted with those three godly alternatives: contentment, confidence in the promises of God, and generosity.