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Scripture and Wisdom

(by Doy Moyer)

Scripture shows that God's concerns are not just for what is technically good or bad, right or wrong, allowed or disallowed. We could argue over what is technically sinful or not, but that's essentially a legalistic approach that misses the essential element of wisdom, especially in matters that are not specifically given. Of course we need to know what Scripture says about right and wrong, but God's intent was not just to provide a list of do's and don'ts. He wants us to learn how to think. He wants us to know principles by which we make wise decisions that glorify Him. It's not just about what we can do legally, but what we should do in any given situation that would glorify Him.

If we push what a text technically says but don't consider how to apply it with wisdom, we've lost the spirit of what God wants from us. We are to discern good from evil as we mature in Christ ([Hebrews 5:12-14](#)). Something might not technically be wrong, but a lack of wisdom in application could be disastrous.

Wisdom is a way of living, a learned skill in what it means to serve the Lord. We cannot reduce that to a mere list. This is one reason why reading a book like Proverbs regularly is vital. Through it we learn discernment. ***"To know wisdom and instruction, to discern the sayings of understanding..."*** We can learn to walk in wisdom ([Eph 5:15-17](#); [Col 4:5-6](#); [Matt 10:16](#)).

"The beginning of wisdom is: Acquire wisdom; and with all your acquiring, get understanding" (Prov 4:7).

Envy & Jealousy (The Competitive Spirit)

Bob Owen

This conversation is certainly not unique to me, but I have had it many times in many places. On some occasions, the person with whom I was talking looked at me with eyes spitting fire; sometimes I looked into eyes of despair; sometimes, sadness. Sometimes this question seemed to be a smokescreen to cover the guilt of the questioner, but often it has come from a troubled heart when a local church has suffered strife and division. Each in his own way asked, "Why can't Christians today be like they were in the days of the New Testament?"

Of course, we are "in the days of the New Testament" now, but we all understand the question: why can't Christians be as the first converts were?

Early Christians are marvelous examples for good in many ways: zeal, sacrifice, and generosity, to name some. In other ways, early Christians suffered weaknesses and failures that trouble churches today.

"Love one another" is easy to say and to sing. It is apparent from both the Scriptures and experience that this is not easily practiced. Almost every New Testament epistle reflects local problems dealing with the proper attitude and behavior among brethren. What God expects is that we develop the spirit Jesus showed when He forfeited personal position or pleasure in favor of even undeserving mankind ([Philippians 2:1-5](#)).

The attitude of Jesus can be summarized with one word: unselfishness. The antithesis of this spirit is what generates two of the most destructive attitudes of all: envy and jealousy. Love for another causes us to “rejoice with those who rejoice” and to “count the other better than self” and to honorably “prefer one another.” Envy does just the opposite.

If completion were wrong in and of itself, the Scriptures would not have made frequent use of the games as illustrations for Christian living. Some contests are truly “friendly competition”, and others are legitimate encounters to determine who is number one. Envy grows from a competitive spirit hidden in a dark corner and prowling only when it feels it will be undetected. This is a sinister, backstabbing motivation that can exist within anyone and within any group.

Evidence that this bad spirit was a problem to the early Christians is seen in the fact that almost every epistle dealt with it. In several cases, the discussion was detailed, and the condemnation was severe. The Galatians were warned, “... **if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another**” (**Galatians 5.15**). Then Paul went immediately into the discussion of the works of the flesh and the fruit of the spirit, closing his plea to live by the spirit, saying, “**Let us not become vainglorious, provoking one another, envying one another**” (**5.26**).

Eight of the fifteen listed works of the flesh deal with problems among brethren. Envy and jealousy serve as bases of wraths, factions and divisions. The green-eyed monster not only leaves a path of bad relationships, it eats the heart out of the one who carries it. Christians should carry a better spirit—the spirit of unselfishness, which is the spirit of Christ.

Psychologists have suggested that envy often indicates an inferiority complex. Whatever its cause, envy is a desire for goods or for honor for self that motivates one to have ill feelings for those who get them. Love rejoices with those who rejoice. Envy may smile outwardly, but inwardly seethes, because either it feels it deserves or wants what the other is getting.

Envy does not always explode in a “jealous rage.” Indeed, it can behave so subtly that we can hide it from others and, to some degree, from ourselves. Nasty comments and/or gossip are not the only signs of the disease. It can prompt one simply to withhold approval from those who seem to profit or succeed. If he will admit it, the envious one knows his heart is not right.

Devastating results have come from envy: Joseph sold to the Midianites; Jesus delivered to Pilate. Imagine how ineffective they would have been if, through envy, Peter and James had refused the “right hand of fellowship” to Paul, or if Paul and Apollos had sought the honors that certain of the Corinthians wanted.

Today, imagine the problems among brethren if preachers envy the work of one another and “always feel compelled” to tell the brethren the weaknesses or failures of each other. Imagine what happens to a congregation when members seek their own good and not that of others. Petty criticisms (motes and beams?) and fault-finding do not really elevate the originator as he might think. Strife, factions, divisions come from hearts that are selfish. Loving hearts are truly happy when others prosper.

Envy is not new, and it probably will be troubling brethren when the Lord returns. One can suffer with greed and never have money. One can envy and never have the things for which he lusts. He may never possess the recognition, honor, or goods he desires, but he can be assured of one reward: “**A tranquil heart is the life of the flesh; but envy is the rottenness of the bones**” (**Proverbs 14.30**). 06/18/24 University Bulletin Tampa