

OVERCOMING ENVY Exodus 20:17

Moses had been leading the Israelites through the wilderness with his brother Aaron and his sister Miriam by his side. **NUMBERS 12** tells us that after a bit of time Aaron and Miriam became a bit envious of Moses. In fact ... their words were **“Has the LORD spoken only through Moses?”** God became upset with their envy and Miriam ended up getting the blunt end of the deal by contracting leprosy because of it. When Aaron came to his spiritual senses, he approached Moses and said ... **“Please, my lord, I ask you not to hold against us the sin we have so foolishly committed.”**

I wanted to tell you this because we need to know that God takes envy seriously!

This morning we are completing our sermon series on “Emoji World”. We have looked at ...

- Overcoming Fear
- Diffusing Anger
- Deleting Guilt

And today we want to learn how to overcome envy.

Turn with me to **EXODUS 10:17**. When you find that passage, you will notice that it is the 10th Commandment of the 10 Commandments. The 10 Commandments were given to Moses by God on Mt. Sinai. It was God’s list of how to “love God and love people.” He made it clear that if you lived out these 10 Commandments that you would be living a holy life.

Now here is the point that I want us to get here. If something hits the big 10 ... then God considers it very important! He considers it to be an essential part of the way we live.

Let’s read the verse ... ¹⁷ **“You shall not covet your neighbor’s house. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”**

If you are looking for the word “Envy” in that verse ... you will not see it. But you will see the word “covet.” Envy and Covet is the same thing.

The definition of “Envy” according to *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* is a painful or resentful awareness of another’s advantage joined with the desire to possess the same advantage.

Strong’s Hebrew Notes indicates “Covet” as a strong uncontrolled desire for someone or something. It is the idea of setting our hearts on something that is not rightfully ours.

Ryken writes in his Exodus Commentary ... It is wanting the wrong thing, in the wrong way, at the wrong time, and for the wrong reason.

(Ryken, p 666 of Exodus Commentary)

Rolling Stones may have said it best when they sang ... *I can't get no satisfaction*

Coveting or envy is the sin of off-based desire! **It is desire out of control.** It is never being satisfied or content with what you have. It is basically greed gone wild. **LUKE 12:15** says it this way ... ¹⁵ **Then he said to them, “Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.”**

When our focus is on personal gratification at the expense of others ... then we have fallen to envy.

Does that mean that all desire is sin? No ... God made us a people of desire ... but the problem is that our desires have been corrupted by a sinful world. Desires become sin when we turn them away from what we should be focused on and toward personal satisfaction!

Some good desires are ...

- Desire for food ... which reminds us to eat
- Desire to do something useful ... which motivates us to work
- Desire for friendship ... which draws us into community
- Desire for intimacy ... which drives us to get married.
- Desire to know God ... which leads us to worship and meditation

But even these things ... that start out as perfectly healthy desires can be corrupted.

- Too much food can lead to gluttony
- Too much desire to do something can lead to being a workaholic
- Too much desire for friendship can lead to a social bug with no depth
- Too much desire for intimacy can lead to desiring your neighbor's wife

The only thing in this list that you cannot get too much of ... is knowing God!

To show us how serious envy can be ... notice what Jesus lists it with in **MARK 7:20-23** ... He went on: "What comes out of a man is what makes him 'unclean.' ²¹ For from within, out of men's hearts, come evil thoughts, sexual immorality, theft, murder, adultery, ²² greed, malice, deceit, lewdness, envy, slander, arrogance and folly. ²³ All these evils come from inside and make a man 'unclean.'" According to Jesus ... Envy has the same results as sexual immorality, theft, murder ... and the list goes on. The result is that it makes us unclean.

If "coveting" or "envy" is that serious ... then what do we do to make sure we do not get entrapped by it?

1 ... STOP COMPARING

I had an Aunt and Uncle that lived out toward Lapel. They had some neighbors that were friends of theirs ... and those friends had one of the worse cases of "keeping up with the Jones's" I have ever known. They would sit in their living room with a pair of binoculars and watch my Aunt and Uncle's house. Anytime they would come home with something ... their neighbors had to go out and buy the same thing ... only a better model. When they bought an Oldsmobile ... the neighbors bought an Oldsmobile ... only the next model up!

Sounds crazy ... right? How could anyone be so obsessed with what their neighbor has that they had to have it? And yet ... how many times do we do the same thing. We may not use a set of binoculars ... but if we see a friend who gets the latest cell phone ... we want it! If they have a new car ... we want it. If they go on a diet and end up with a new body ... we want it.

I like how the great philosopher Erma Bombeck phrased it ... "Lord, if I cannot be thin, please make my friends look fat."

One man captured this thought with “How can I ever get out of debt if my neighbor keeps buying stuff?”

I guess we think that if they have something that we don't have ... that makes them a better person.

Listen to me ... when you measure yourself with other people ... then one of two things will happen.

1... You are going to come up short and be extremely dissatisfied ... and start coveting what they have ... or

2 ... You are going to have more and become proud

In either case ... it is sin.

Paul says it this way in **2 CORINTHIANS 10:12 ...** ¹² We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some who commend themselves. When they measure themselves by themselves and compare themselves with themselves, they are not wise.

Let me ask you something ...

- You ever get angry because someone else got the promotion at your workplace and you thought you should have gotten it? You wanted that so badly!
- You ever have a friend that got a new car and they brought it over for you to see it and inside you were so envious. You were the one that should have a new car ... not them!

Isn't it amazing that we can feel so content with what we have until we start measuring what we have with what others have? You want to know a way to keep from coveting what your neighbor has? Stop comparing yourself to them!

PHILIPPIANS 4:12 ... ¹² I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

2 ... GROW IN GRATITUDE

Earl Vickers wrote ...

- I once had no shoes to wear ... Then I met a man who had no feet

- I once had no food to eat ... Then I met a man who had no teeth

We are so blessed! Every one of us here this morning did not have to sleep out in the cold last night! None of us have gone the last week without food. None had to borrow clothes from a friend to be able to come to church this morning. I would venture to say that no one had to hitchhike to get here. God has blessed us in every way!

Now I am not saying that none of us have not fallen on bad times ... either in the past ... or maybe even right now! **I had a friend say that when he and his wife were first married that they were so poor that they would go to the KFC and lick other people's fingers.** But the fact is ... we are truly truly blessed!

Think with me for a moment. Let's say that everything we have here on earth was taken away from us right now ... we have nothing left ... no home, no food, no clothing, no health ... then what?

Let me have the author of Hebrews answer that question ... **HEBREWS 12:28 ...**
²⁸Therefore, since we are receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, let us be thankful, and so worship God acceptably with reverence and awe,

We have every reason to be grateful ... not envious! We have a mansion waiting for us that will be ours for eternity! As Exodus puts it ... Your neighbor's house, wife, servants, ox or donkey could not begin to match up with that. Or maybe it would be easier to understand in 21st Century vernacular ... Your neighbor's Porsche, Five bedroom house, bass boat, or trophy wife could not touch what God has waiting for you.

I am afraid that more of us are like Dennis the Menace than we want to admit ... Dennis was browsing through a catalog, and said ... "This catalog has a lot of toys I did not even know I wanted."

So ... be content ... be grateful ... no one has anything over on you!

3 ... GIVE GENEROUSLY

Generosity is the cure for envy and coveting! When it becomes a habit for you to give ... then wanting what others have takes a back seat.

Not long ago I was in my office and Sophie was here with Emily. Sophie snuck into my office and handed me a picture of stick people that she had drawn. She was smiling from ear to ear. She was so excited to give me that picture that she had drawn. We could learn a lesson from Sophie. It truly is “more blessed to give than to receive!” **It really is the antidote to envy!**

Then there was Howard Hughes. Howard was the richest man in the world in his era. He was also one of the most miserable men. You know why? Because he could never get enough. There was never enough money. Never enough power. Never enough of anything. He died a very lonely miserable man. In fact ... he is quoted saying “I am not a paranoid deranged millionaire. I am a billionaire.”

Until we can understand that true happiness comes from being generous ... we may never be set free from envy.

1 TIMOTHY 6:6-9 ... ⁶ But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷ For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out of it. ⁸ But if we have food and clothing, we will be content with that. ⁹ Those who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge people into ruin and destruction.

You want to keep from being entrapped by envy? Then be generous.

4 ... UNDERSTAND VALUE

One of the best ways to keep from falling into the trap of envy is to understand what true value is. Not value to the world ... they don't have a clue what value is. True value is what God calls valuable. And listen to this ... this is really important. Worldly goods and pleasures are the last things that God sees as valuable.

Is worldly power valuable to God? ... Jesus Christ is the most powerful being that has ever walked this earth. No one can come close. But notice what **PHILIPPIANS 2:6-8a** says ... ⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage; ⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. ⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself

God's value concerning power is the exact opposite of what the world teaches ... he wants us to be humble. **MATTHEW 5:5** says ... **Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth.**

God's value system is not based on power ... so as Christians ... why should we be envious of people in power?

Is popularity valuable to God? ... Surely God wants us to be popular! God does not want his people to be shabby and hated, right? As hard as I might look in the Bible ... I cannot find that appearance and likeability impresses God. Think for a moment about some of the people that He used for ministry ...

- Some of the apostles were fishermen. Ever stand next to a fisherman right after he cleaned fish? How about shaking their hand?
- Some were shepherds. Shepherds were the lowest on the totem pole you could get. They were so low that they were hated by the Religious elite.
- Some were tax collectors ... Guess I don't have to say anything about them.
- Some were prostitutes ... You probably would not win a popularity contest with a boy's mom if he brought you home to introduce you to her.

The point is ... God's value is not based on popularity! So as Christians ... why should we be envious of those who are popular?

Is worldly prosperity valuable to God? ... No! In fact ... worldly prosperity is often the very thing that keeps us from what is valuable to God! When we start relying on our bank accounts and our 401k's ... we stop relying on Him. And that does not please him!

Listen to what Christ says in **REVELATION 3:17** ... ¹⁷ **You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked.**

When we start seeing worldly things as valuable ... we miss out on what God sees as valuable. That is what envy does to us. We start chasing after things and pleasures and it leads right into a life of sin.

CONCLUSION ...

So what is valuable to God? What does he want us to chase after? If there is anything that he would want us to be envious of ... what would it be? What does God want us to desire?

Look at **1PETER 1:14-15** ... As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. ¹⁵ But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do;

God wants us to have an uncontrollable desire for holiness! He wants us to want to be holy! He wants us to want him. Now understand this ... this is very very important ... He does not want us to want to be him ... he wants us to love him and have an uncontrollable desire to have a relationship with him.

PSALM 42:1b ... As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God.

If there is ever envy that God would be pleased with ... it would be that!