

*Jealousy  
A Dividing  
Source*

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## Forward

Rivalries, arguments, and disagreements among believers can be destructive.

Jesus understood how destructive arguments among brothers could be. In his final prayer before being betrayed and arrested, Jesus asked God that his followers be “one” (John 17:21).

What is your response when a fellow Christian is honored? How do you respond when someone is suffering? We are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

Too often, unfortunately, we are jealous of those who rejoice and apathetic toward those who weep. Believers are in the world together—there is no such thing as private or individualistic Christianity.

We shouldn’t stop with enjoying only our own relationship with God; we need to get involved in the lives of others.

In this study you will review the problem of facing others with jealousy.

On your road to Christian service we cannot be successful if jealousy or envy travels with us. A competitive spirit is an ungodly spirit.

## Chapter 1



**Jealousy can tear believers apart.**

### **Genesis 13:7-8**

**So an argument broke out between the herdsmen of Abram and Lot. At that time Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land.**

**Then Abram talked it over with Lot. "This arguing between our herdsmen has got to stop," he said. "After all, we are close relatives!"**

Surrounded by hostile neighbors, the herdsmen of Abram and Lot should have pulled together. Instead, they let petty jealousy tear them apart. Similar situations exist today. Christians often bicker while Satan is at work all around them.

Rivalries, arguments, and disagreements among believers can be destructive in three ways.

- (1) They damage goodwill, trust, and peace—the foundations of good human relations.
- (2) They hamper progress toward important goals.
- (3) They make us self-centered rather than love-centered.

Jesus understood how destructive arguments among brothers could be. In his final prayer before being betrayed and arrested, Jesus asked God that his followers be “one” (John 17:21).

John 17:21

**My prayer for all of them is that they will be one, just as you and I are one, Father—that just as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me.**

When Christians are involved in jealousy and envy they are promoting the doctrine that Jesus and God are not one, and that believers are not one. How dare to promote such teachings.

**Jealousy is a strong dividing force.**

**Genesis 26:12-16**

**That year Isaac's crops were tremendous! He harvested a hundred times more grain than he planted, for the Lord blessed him.**

**He became a rich man, and his wealth only continued to grow. He acquired large flocks of sheep and goats, great herds of cattle, and many servants. Soon the Philistines became jealous of him, and they filled up all of Isaac's wells with earth. These were the wells that had been dug by the servants of his father, Abraham.**

**And Abimelech asked Isaac to leave the country. "Go somewhere else," he said, "for you have become too rich and powerful for us."**

God kept his promise to bless Isaac. The neighboring Philistines grew jealous because everything Isaac did seemed to go right. So they

plugged his wells and tried to get rid of him. Jealousy is a dividing force strong enough to tear apart the mightiest of nations or the closest of friends.

It forces you to separate yourself from what you were longing for in the first place. When you find yourself becoming jealous of others, try thanking God for their good fortune. Before striking out in anger, consider what you could lose—a friend, a job, or a spouse.

### **Jealousy causes blind anger.**

#### **Genesis 27:41**

**Esau hated Jacob because he had stolen his blessing, and he said to himself, "My father will soon be dead and gone. Then I will kill Jacob."**

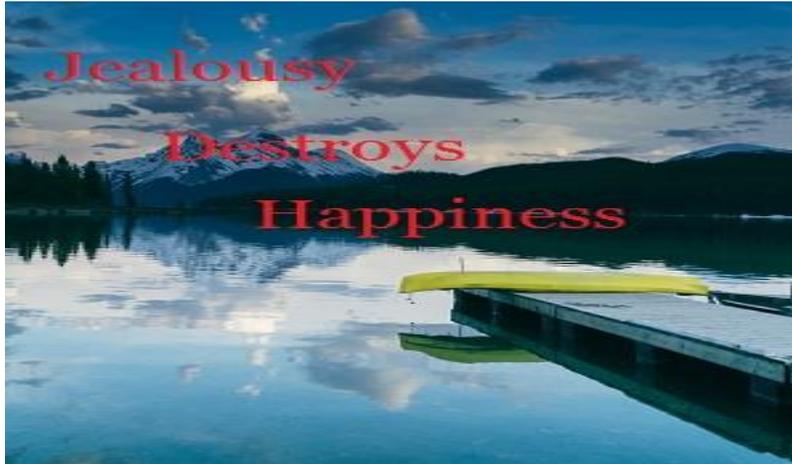
Esau was so angry at Jacob that he failed to see his own wrong in giving away the birthright in the first place. Jealous anger blinds us from seeing the benefits we have and makes us dwell on what we don't have.

When Esau lost the valuable family blessing, his future suddenly changed. Reacting in anger, he decided to kill Jacob.

When you lose something of great value, or if others conspire against you and succeed, anger is the first and most natural reaction. But you can control your feelings by

- (1) Recognizing your reaction for what it is,
- (2) Praying for strength, and
- (3) Asking God for help to see the opportunities that even your bad situation may provide.

## Chapter 2



**Jealousy over others' success and happiness.**

### **Genesis 31:1-2**

**But Jacob soon learned that Lagan's sons were beginning to grumble. "Jacob has robbed our father!" they said. "All his wealth has been gained at our father's expense." And Jacob began to notice a considerable cooling in Laban's attitude toward him.**

Jacob's wealth made Laban's sons jealous. It is sometimes difficult to be happy when others are doing better than we are. To compare our success with that of others is a dangerous way to judge the quality of our lives. By comparing ourselves to others, we may be giving jealousy a foothold. We can avoid jealousy by rejoicing in others' successes (see Romans 12:15).

**To compare ourselves with others is unwise.**

### **Luke 9:49-50**

**John said to Jesus, "Master, we saw someone using your name to**

**cast out demons. We tried to stop him because he isn't in our group." But Jesus said, "Don't stop him! Anyone who is not against you is for you."**

The disciples were jealous. Nine of them together were unable to drive out a single evil spirit (Luke 9:40), but when they saw a man who was not one of their group driving out demons, they told him to stop. Our pride is hurt when someone else succeeds where we have failed, but Jesus says there is no room for such jealousy in the spiritual warfare of his kingdom. Share Jesus' open-arms attitude to Christian workers outside your group.

### **1 Cor. 12:25-26**

**This makes for harmony among the members, so that all the members care for each other equally. [26] If one part suffers, all the parts suffer with it, and if one part is honored, all the parts are glad.**

What is your response when a fellow Christian is honored? How do you respond when someone is suffering? We are called to rejoice with those who rejoice and weep with those who weep (Romans 12:15).

Too often, unfortunately, we are jealous of those who rejoice and apathetic toward those who weep. Believers are in the world together—there is no such thing as private or individualistic Christianity.

We shouldn't stop with enjoying only our own relationship with God; we need to get involved in the lives of others.

## **Jealousy can lead to other sins.**

### **Genesis 37:19-20**

**"Here comes that dreamer!" they exclaimed. "Come on, let's kill him and throw him into a deep pit. We can tell our father that a wild animal has eaten him. Then we'll see what becomes of all his dreams!"**

Could jealousy ever make you feel like killing someone? Before saying, "Of course not," look at what happened in this story.

Ten men were willing to kill their younger brother over a robe and a few reported dreams. Their deep jealousy had grown into ugly rage, completely blinding them to what was right. Jealousy can be difficult to recognize because our reasons for it seem to make sense.

But left unchecked, jealousy grows quickly and leads to serious sins. The longer you cultivate jealous feelings, the harder it is to uproot them. The time to deal with jealousy is when you notice yourself keeping score of what others have. Jealousy leads to criticism.

### **PROFILE: MIRIAM**

Ask older brothers or sisters what their greatest trial in life is and they will often answer, "My younger brother (or sister)!" This is especially true when the younger sibling is more successful than the older. The bonds of family loyalty can be strained to the breaking point.

When we first meet Miriam she is involved in one of history's most unusual baby-sitting jobs. She is watching her infant brother float on the Nile River in a waterproof cradle. Miriam's quick thinking allowed

Moses to be raised by his own mother. Her protective superiority, reinforced by that event, must have been hard to give up as she watched her little brother rise to greatness.

Eventually Moses' choice of a wife gave Miriam an opportunity to criticize. It was natural for her insecurity to break out over this issue.

With Moses married, Miriam was clearly no longer the most important woman in his life. The real issue, however, was not the kind of woman Moses had married. It was the fact that he was now the most important man in Israel.

“Has the Lord spoken only through Moses? . . . Hasn't he also spoken through us?” No mention is made of Moses' response, but God had a quick answer for Miriam and Aaron. Without denying their role in his plan, God clearly pointed out his special relationship with Moses. Miriam was stricken with leprosy, a deadly disease, as punishment for her insubordination.

But Moses, true to his character, intervened for his sister so that God healed Miriam of her leprosy.

Before criticizing someone else, we need to pause long enough to discover our own motives. Failing to do this can bring disastrous results. What is often labeled “constructive criticism” may actually be destructive jealousy, since the easiest way to raise our own status is to bring someone else down. Are you willing to question your motives before you offer criticism? Does the critical finger you point need to be pointed first toward yourself?

## Chapter 3



**When jealousy is good.**

**Deut. 4:24**

**The Lord your God is a devouring fire, a jealous God.**

God is a consuming fire. Because he is morally perfect, he hates sin and cannot accept those who practice it. Moses' sin kept him from entering the Promised Land, and no sacrifice could remove that judgment. Sin kept us from entering God's presence, but Jesus Christ paid the penalty for our sin and removed God's judgment forever by his death. Trusting in Jesus Christ will save you from God's anger and will allow you to begin a personal relationship with him.

Jealousy is a demand for someone else's exclusive affection or loyalty. Some jealousy is bad. It is destructive for a man to get upset when his wife talks pleasantly with another man. But other jealousy is good. It is right for a man to demand that his wife treat him, and only him, as her husband. Usually we use the word *jealousy* only for the bad reaction. But God's kind of jealousy is appropriate and good. He is defending his word and his high honor. He makes a strong, exclusive demand on us:

We must treat only the Lord—and no one else in all the universe—as God.

### **Don't let jealousy get a foothold**

#### **1 Samuel 18:8**

**This made Saul very angry. "What's this?" he said. "They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!"**

Saul's appreciation for David turned to jealousy as people began to applaud David's exploits. In a jealous rage, Saul attempted to murder David by hurling his spear at him (1 Samuel 18:11-12).

Jealousy may not seem to be a major sin, but in reality, it is one step short of murder. Jealousy starts as you resent a rival; it leads to your wishing he or she were removed; then it manifests itself in your seeking ways to harm that person in word or action. Beware of letting jealousy get a foothold in your life.

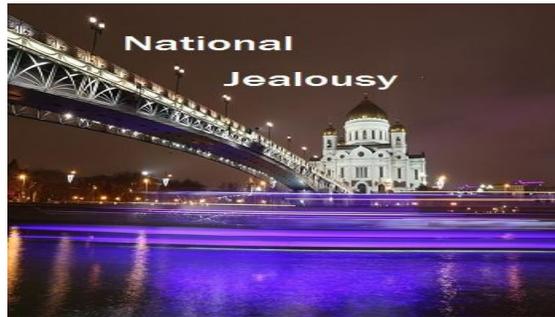
### **Befriend those who are jealous of you**

#### **1 Samuel 18:11-12**

**Suddenly Saul hurled his sword at David, intending to pin him to the wall. But David jumped aside and escaped. This happened another time, too, for Saul was afraid of him, and he was jealous because the Lord had left him and was now with David.**

Saul tried to kill David because he was jealous of David's popularity, yet David continued to protect and comfort Saul. Perhaps people have been jealous of you and have even attacked you in some way. They may be intimidated by your strengths, which make them conscious of their own shortcomings. It would be natural to strike back or to avoid them. A better response is to befriend them (Matthew 5:43-44) and to ask God for the strength to continue to love them, as David kept on loving Saul.

## Chapter 4



### Tribal jealousies caused Israel to divide

#### 1 Kings 12:20

**When the people of Israel learned of Jeroboam's return from Egypt, they called an assembly and made him king over all Israel. So only the tribe of Judah remained loyal to the family of David.**

This marks the beginning of the division of the kingdom that lasted for centuries. Ten of Israel's 12 tribes followed Jeroboam and called their new nation Israel (the northern kingdom). The other two tribes remained loyal to Rehoboam and called their nation Judah (the southern kingdom).

The kingdom did not split overnight. It was already dividing as early as the days of the judges because of tribal jealousies, especially between Ephraim, the most influential tribe of the north, and Judah, the chief tribe of the south.

Before the days of Saul and David, the religious center of Israel was located, for the most part, in the territory of Ephraim. When Solomon built the temple, he moved the religious center of Israel to Jerusalem.

This eventually brought tribal rivalries to the breaking point. (For more information on tribal jealousies and how they affected Israel, see Judges 12:1ff; 2 Samuel 2:4ff; 2 Samuel 19:41-43.)

## **Jealousy of God**

### **Nahum 1:2**

**The Lord is a jealous God, filled with vengeance and wrath. He takes revenge on all who oppose him and furiously destroys his enemies!**

God alone has the right to be jealous and to carry out vengeance. Jealousy and vengeance may be surprising terms to associate with God. When humans are jealous and take vengeance, they are usually acting in a spirit of selfishness.

But it is appropriate for God to insist on our complete allegiance, and it is just for him to punish unrepentant evildoers. His jealousy and vengeance are unmixed with selfishness. Their purpose is to remove sin and restore peace to the world (Deut. 4:24; Deut. 5:9).

### **Jealousy over people who seemed blessed by God.**

### **Luke 1:42-43**

**Elizabeth gave a glad cry and exclaimed to Mary, "You are blessed by God above all other women, and your child is blessed. What an honor this is, that the mother of my Lord should visit me!"**

Apparently the Holy Spirit told Elizabeth that Mary's child was the Messiah because Elizabeth called her young relative "the mother of my Lord" as she greeted her. As Mary rushed off to visit her relative, she must have been wondering if the events of the last few days were real.

Elizabeth's greeting must have strengthened her faith. Mary's pregnancy may have seemed impossible, but her wise relative believed in the Lord's faithfulness and rejoiced in Mary's blessed condition.

Even though she herself was pregnant with a long-awaited son, Elizabeth could have envied Mary, whose son would be even greater than her own. Instead she was filled with joy that the mother of her Lord would visit her.

Have you ever envied people whom God has apparently singled out for special blessing? A cure for jealousy is to rejoice with those people, realizing that God uses his people in ways best suited to his purpose.

### **Why religious leaders were jealous of Jesus**

#### **Mark 3:2**

**Since it was the Sabbath, Jesus' enemies watched him closely. Would he heal the man's hand on the Sabbath? If he did, they planned to condemn him.**

Under Jewish law there was only one high priest. He was appointed from Aaron's line, and he held his position for life. By this time, however, the religious system had been corrupted, and the Roman government was appointing its own religious leaders to maintain greater control over the Jews. Apparently the Roman authorities had deposed the Jewish-appointed Annas and had replaced him with Annas's son-in-law, Caiaphas. Nevertheless, Annas retained his title (see Acts 4:6) and probably also much of the power it carried. Because the Jews believed the high priest's position to be for life, they would have continued to call Annas their high priest.

Pilate, Herod, and Caiaphas were the most powerful leaders in Palestine, but a desert prophet from rural Judea upstaged them. God chose to speak through the loner John the Baptist, who has gone down in history as greater than any of the rulers of his day. How often we judge people by our culture's standards—power, wealth, and beauty—and miss the truly great people through whom God works!

Greatness is not measured by what you have, but by your faith in God. Like John, give yourself entirely to God so God's power can work through you.

## Chapter 5



### Jealousy over others' gifts and abilities

**Matthew 20:15**

**Is it against the law for me to do what I want with my money?  
Should you be angry because I am kind?'**

**This parable is not about rewards but about salvation. It is a strong teaching about *grace*, God's generosity. We shouldn't begrudge those who turn to God in the last moments of life, because, in reality, *no one* deserves eternal life.**

Many people we don't expect to see in the kingdom will be there. The criminal who repented as he was dying (Luke 23:40-43) will be there along with people who have believed and served God for many years.

Do you resent God's gracious acceptance of the despised, the outcast, and the sinners who have turned to him for forgiveness? Are you ever jealous of what God has given to another person? Instead, focus on God's gracious benefits to you, and be thankful for what you have.

## **1 Cor. 12:14-24**

**Yes, the body has many different parts, not just one part. If the foot says, "I am not a part of the body because I am not a hand," that does not make it any less a part of the body. And if the ear says, "I am not part of the body because I am only an ear and not an eye," would that make it any less a part of the body? Suppose the whole body was an eye—then how would you hear? Or if your whole body were just one big ear, how could you smell anything?**

**But God made our bodies with many parts, and he has put each part just where he wants it. What a strange thing a body would be if it had only one part! Yes, there are many parts, but only one body.**

**The eye can never say to the hand, "I don't need you." The head can't say to the feet, "I don't need you."**

**In fact, some of the parts that seem weakest and least important are really the most necessary. And the parts we regard as less honorable are those we clothe with the greatest care.**

**So we carefully protect from the eyes of others those parts that should not be seen, while other parts do not require this special care. So God has put the body together in such a way that extra honor and care are given to those parts that have less dignity.**

Using the analogy of the body, Paul emphasizes the importance of each church member (see the note on ■1 Cor. 12:12). If a seemingly insignificant part is taken away, the whole body becomes less effective. Thinking that your gift is more important than someone else's is an expression of spiritual pride. We should not look down on those who seem unimportant, and we should not be jealous of others who have impressive gifts. Instead, we should use the gifts we have been given and encourage others to use theirs. If we don't, the body of believers will be less effective.

## **Religious leaders jealous of apostles**

**Acts 5:17**

**The high priest and his friends, who were Sadducees, reacted with violent jealousy.**

The religious leaders were jealous—Peter and the apostles were already commanding more respect than they had ever received. The difference, however, was that the religious leaders demanded respect and reverence for themselves; the apostles' goal was to bring respect and reverence to God. The apostles were respected not because they demanded it, but because they deserved it.

## **Why religious leaders jealous of Paul.**

**Acts 17:5**

**But the Jewish leaders were jealous, so they gathered some worthless fellows from the streets to form a mob and start a riot. They attacked the home of Jason, searching for Paul and Silas so they could drag them out to the crowd.**

The Jewish leaders didn't refute the theology of Paul and Silas, but they were jealous of the popularity of these itinerant preachers. Their motives for causing the riot were rooted in personal jealousy, not doctrinal purity.

## **Jealousy makes us try to stop even God's work.**

### **Acts 13:42-45**

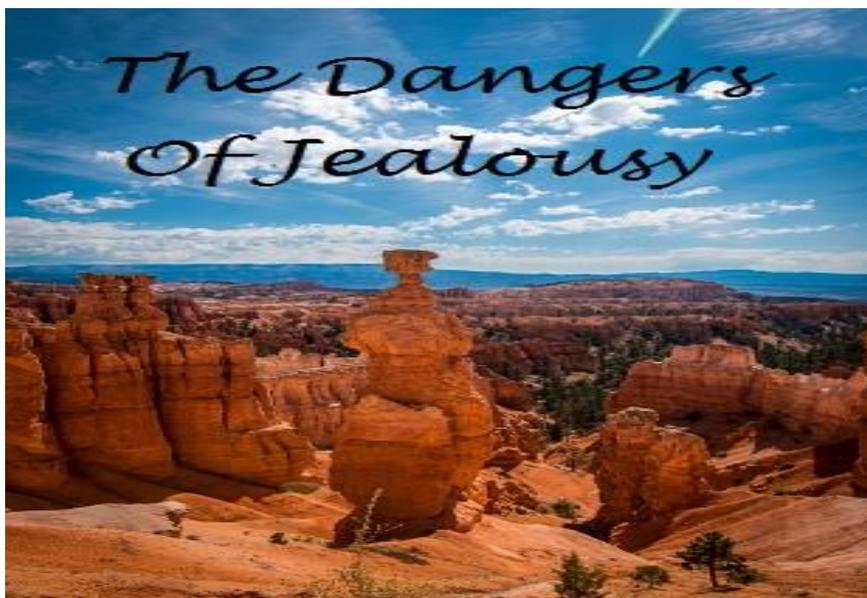
**As Paul and Barnabas left the synagogue that day, the people asked them to return again and speak about these things the next week. Many Jews and godly converts to Judaism who worshiped at the synagogue followed Paul and Barnabas, and the two men urged them, "By God's grace, remain faithful."**

**The following week almost the entire city turned out to hear them preach the word of the Lord. But when the Jewish leaders saw the crowds, they were jealous; so they slandered Paul and argued against whatever he said.**

The Jewish leaders undoubtedly brought theological arguments against Paul and Barnabas, but Luke tells us that the real reason for their hostility was that “they were filled with jealousy.”

When we see others succeeding where we haven't, or receiving the affirmation we crave, it is hard to rejoice with them. Jealousy is our natural reaction. But how tragic it is when our own jealous feelings make us try to stop God's work. If a work is God's work, rejoice in it—no matter who is doing it.

## Chapter 6



**Don't underestimate the danger of jealousy**

**Romans 13:12-14**

**The night is almost gone; the day of salvation will soon be here. So don't live in darkness. Get rid of your evil deeds. Shed them like dirty clothes. Clothe yourselves with the armor of right living, as those who live in the light.**

**We should be decent and true in everything we do, so that everyone can approve of our behavior. Don't participate in wild parties and getting drunk, or in adultery and immoral living, or in fighting and jealousy. But let the Lord Jesus Christ take control of you, and don't think of ways to indulge your evil desires.**

The *night* refers to the present evil time. The *day* refers to the time of Christ's return. Some people are surprised that Paul lists dissension and jealousy with the gross and obvious sins of orgies, drunkenness, and sexual immorality. Like Jesus in his Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-

7), Paul considers attitudes as important as actions. Just as hatred leads to murder, so jealousy leads to strife and lust to adultery.

When Christ returns, he wants to find his people clean on the inside as well as on the outside.

## **Envy**

### **Definition of envy**

#### **Exodus 20:17**

"Do not covet your neighbor's house. Do not covet your neighbor's wife, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else your neighbor owns."

To covet is to wish to have the possessions of others. It goes beyond simply admiring someone else's possessions or thinking, "I'd like to have one of those." Coveting includes envy—resenting the fact that others have what you don't. God knows, however, that possessions never make anyone happy for long. Since only God can supply all our needs, true contentment is found only in him.

When you begin to covet, try to determine if a more basic need is leading you to envy. For example, you may covet someone's success, not because you want to take it away from him, but because you would like to feel as appreciated by others as he is. If this is the case, pray that God will help you deal with your resentment and meet your basic needs.

## **Danger of envy**

**Deut. 5:21**

**" 'Do not covet your neighbor's wife. Do not covet your neighbor's house or land, male or female servant, ox or donkey, or anything else your neighbor owns.'**

To covet is to desire another person's prosperity. We are not to set our desires on anything that belongs to someone else. Not only can such desires make us miserable, they can also lead us to other sins such as adultery and stealing. Envy is a useless exercise because God is able to provide everything we really need, even if he does not always give us everything we want.

To stop coveting, we need to practice being content with what we have. The apostle Paul emphasizes the significance of contentment in Phil. 4:11. It's a matter of perspective. Instead of thinking about what we don't have, we should thank God for what he has given and strive to be content. After all, our most important possession is free and available to everyone—eternal life through Christ.

**Envy blinds us to our sins.**

1 Kings 21:20

**And Ahab said to Elijah, Hast thou found me, O mine enemy? And he answered, I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to work evil in the sight of the Lord.**

**Ahab still refused to admit his sin against God. Instead he accused Elijah of being his enemy. When we are blinded by envy and hatred, it is almost impossible to see our own sin.**

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**References:**

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**Additional comments and charts are taken from:**

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