

Envy and Jealousy— Enemies of God's People

“Love envieth not.” **IN OUR OPENING SCRIPTURE,** Paul wrote that godly love cannot be envious of others, or of the good things

which they enjoy. In another place, he stated that love is one of the principal fruits of the Spirit, whereas “envyings” are “works of the flesh.” Paul further said, “If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.” (Gal. 5:19-26) Every follower of the Master should desire to be filled and controlled by the spirit of love, and should have, therefore, no reason to be envious of others. However, the human heart is “deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked.” (Jer. 17:9) Thus we need to be constantly on the alert, lest we falsely reason that it is proper under certain conditions to be envious of the Lord’s blessings upon others.

Jealousy is very much akin to envy. Solomon wrote that “jealousy is cruel as the grave.” (Song of Sol. 8:6) If we permit its poisonous fangs to lay hold upon us, jealousy will rob our hearts of the peace and joy in the Lord which might be ours. We should not assume that we are immune from attacks by this evil monster of jealousy. It is not only necessary that we be on guard over our hearts, but through prayer seek the Lord’s help and protection, realizing that in our weakness we cannot always fully understand our own ways and motives. David wrote, “Who can understand his errors? cleanse thou me from secret faults.”—Ps. 19:12

CAIN

The Scriptures present us with a number of examples of individuals who permitted themselves to be swayed by envy and jealousy, and of the evils to which they led. Cain is the first of these. While neither the words envy nor jealousy are used in connection with Cain, it was undoubtedly these aspects of sin, or selfishness, which overcame him. The record states that he was “very wroth” over the fact that God accepted Abel’s offering and rejected his. (Gen. 4:5) The Apostle John warns that we should, instead, “love one another,” and not be as Cain, “who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother.”—I John 3:11,12

In the case of Cain, as also with the other examples of the sin of envy and jealousy we find in the Bible, the individuals involved ignored God and his part in their experiences. Actually, Abel had nothing to do with the rejection of Cain’s offering. Proper humble reasoning would have sent Cain to God to

find out why his offering had not been “excellent” as Abel’s. (Heb. 11:4) However, he ignored God and slew the one upon whom God had manifested his blessing. How unwise it would be for us to harbor even the slightest suspicion of envy toward those whom God is blessing. To do so would indicate that we ourselves are unworthy of the good things which he bestows upon those whom we envy.

AARON AND MIRIAM

Aaron and Miriam, the brother and sister of Moses, were guilty on one occasion of allowing the spirit of jealousy to motivate their attitude toward their brother. The account indicates that these two servants of the Lord trumped up a charge against Moses to conceal what they really had in mind. We read, “Miriam and Aaron spake against Moses because of the Ethiopian woman whom he had married: for he had married an Ethiopian woman. And they said, Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses? hath he not spoken also by us? And the LORD heard it.”—Num. 12:1,2

Are we always conscious of the fact that the Lord also hears what we say, and that he knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts? Paul wrote, “Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.” (Heb. 4:13) This was true in the case of Aaron and Miriam. God knew their observation that Moses had married an Ethiopian was merely a ploy. What was really festering in their hearts was the spirit of envy over the fact that their brother Moses was being so abundantly used as the Lord’s

mouthpiece when they felt that they were just as qualified as he.

Reading their hearts, the Lord knew that Aaron and Miriam had merely been temporarily overcome by the great Adversary, so he dealt with the situation in a way to recover them from this “snare of the fowler.” (Ps. 91:3) As for Moses, he apparently made no effort to defend himself against the charge, although it must have been a difficult experience to find himself attacked by members of his own family. However, the Lord vindicated Moses, and after severely punishing Miriam, took Aaron and Miriam back into his favor and service.

SAUL

In King Saul of Israel we have another example of the cruelty wrought by envy and jealousy when these are permitted to take root in the heart. Saul was a man who, literally, stood head and shoulders above most of his fellow Israelites. Apparently, however, he had never been impressed with the idea that this made him any more important than others. Indeed, when he was chosen to be Israel’s first king, he said, “Am not I a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel? and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin?”—I Sam. 9:21

Regrettably, Saul did not maintain this humble estimate of himself. He became so important in his own eyes that he presumed to disobey the instructions of the Lord. (I Sam. 13:11,12; 15:17-23) Samuel reminded Saul that it was when he was “little” in his own sight that he had been made head of the tribes of Israel, and had been anointed to reign

over them. However, once Saul sensed that he had power in his hands, he forgot that he was “little,” and did not hesitate to go contrary to God’s instructions. Accused of this, he blamed the sin on the people, but God held him responsible, and he was rejected by the Lord.

As invariably happens when self-interest takes over the control of the life of one of God’s servants, Saul sought to conduct his rulership entirely upon the basis of what would be best for him. God had rejected him, so he tried to rule Israel as though God had nothing to say in the affairs of the nation. This surely led to his own undoing, and in his retreat from God the ugly spirit of envy and jealousy began to take hold upon him.

Saul was renowned among the Israelites as a brave and efficient warrior. Beginning with the slaying of the giant, Goliath, however, David’s reputation as a warrior increased and soon eclipsed Saul’s. We read, “It came to pass . . . when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, that the women came out of all cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet king Saul, with tabrets, with joy, and with instruments of musick. And the women answered one another as they played, and said, Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands. And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, They have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they have ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward.”—I Sam. 18:6-9

Saul “eyed” David from then on. In his jealousy he sought to kill him, and David was obliged to

hide from his wrath, while Saul hunted him as he would a prey. By contrast, David manifested no inclination to seek revenge against his persecutor. On one occasion, while hunting the object of his insane envy and jealousy, Saul inadvertently exposed himself to capture and death at the hands of David. One of David's friends said to him, "God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand this day: now therefore let me smite him, I pray thee, with the spear even to the earth at once."—I Sam. 26:8

This was a persuasive argument—"God hath delivered thine enemy into thine hand." If David had harbored the slightest trace of envy and hatred toward Saul this argument would have been convincing, and he would have permitted him to be slain. Here is a heart-searching point for our consideration. Is there any possibility that we may rest contentedly in the idea that the envious action we might take, or permit against others, is the Lord's will? David had a different view, a better one—the Lord's view. He answered, "Destroy him not: for who can stretch forth his hand against the LORD'S anointed, and be guiltless? . . . As the LORD liveth, the LORD shall smite him; or his day shall come to die; or he shall descend into battle, and perish. The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD'S anointed."—I Sam. 26:9-11

How wonderfully did David thus display his faith in the overruling providences of God! While Samuel had anointed him to be the new king of Israel, he was quite willing to wait the Lord's own due time to take over the reins of government, and apparently he held no resentment against

Saul, even though he had been treated so unjustly by him.

In these experiences of Saul and David there are valuable lessons for us. Most of the Lord's people no doubt feel quite "little" at the time of their consecration. How important it is that this attitude of meekness and humility be maintained. The Lord may bless us in his service. He may even permit some of his people to attain positions of prominence among the brethren. This is a real test, for it could be that those who were "little" in their own eyes to begin with may become proud, and in their pride become envious of others whom the Lord may also richly bless in his service.

David's generous and loving spirit was demonstrated in the fact that he did not attempt to take the kingdom from Saul or destroy him, even though he knew Saul had been rejected by God. Under such circumstances many would have perhaps expressed delight to have had the opportunity to destroy a rival and an enemy, rejoicing that the Lord's judgments had thus fallen upon him. However, David was not of that disposition. He was a man after God's own heart, one of the qualities of his character being largeness, mercy, and the spirit of love. (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) Thus we see that there is no room for envy and jealousy in a heart that is filled with the Spirit of the Lord.

JESUS

The crowning example with regard to this subject is our Master, Jesus. Prior to Pentecost, Jesus' disciples were concerned over who should be greatest among them. We read that "there arose a reasoning

among them, which of them should be greatest. And Jesus, perceiving the thought of their heart, took a child, and set him by him, And said unto them, Whosoever shall receive this child in my name receiveth me: and whosoever shall receive me receiveth him that sent me: for he that is least among you all, the same shall be great.”—Luke 9:46-48

The reply Jesus received to this lesson is most unusual. We read that “John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us.” To this Jesus replied, “Forbid him not: for he that is not against us is for us.” (vss. 49,50) The connection here is interesting. The disciples had just been told that the important ideal for which to strive was not being great, but “least”—that is, within their own circle. Here, however, was a man outside of their circle, and surely Jesus would approve their show of authority toward him. Indeed, it seems that the fallen flesh is prone, at times, to exercise self-importance and “lordship” over others.

Once again Jesus told his disciples they were wrong. He had not especially invited this worker to serve him, but certainly Jesus was not envious of what he was doing. It is true that Jesus did not instruct his disciples to go out and cooperate with this independent worker, nor to try and bring him into their fellowship. However, the point to be stressed here is that Jesus was in no way envious of this man who was serving independently of him and of his disciples. “Forbid him not”—that is, “just leave him alone,” the Master instructed. This is also a good lesson for us. The Lord of the present

harvest is great and all-powerful. He is able to manage his affairs without our interfering with those who may not be serving just as we are, or with the brethren who make up our fellowship.

To follow this example and instruction of Jesus does not imply that in any manner we are to compromise the Truth. All it means is that we are to go forward in the service as the Lord has given us the opportunity, and not to be overly concerned with the course adopted by others. The temptation to interfere, as the disciples did, does not necessarily imply an envious spirit. It could be, and often is, simply the result of a misdirected zeal. However, whatever the motive may be, Jesus said, "Forbid him not."

PAUL

In the Apostle Paul we have another wonderful example of the largeness of heart for which we should strive—in direct opposition to the spirit of envy and jealousy. In the church at Corinth there was much rivalry, which Paul designated "carnality." In writing to these brethren, he pointed out the error of their position. Some claimed that they were of Paul—others that they followed Apollos. Paul wrote, "Who . . . is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man? I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour."—I Cor. 3:5-8

It should be observed that the issue here discussed by Paul is not related to false doctrine. He does not say that those who preach the Truth and those who preach error are all one. The issue was rivalry over who was to be the recognized servant of the Lord in preaching the Truth. In this, he comes directly to the point by saying that the “Lord gave to every man” this ministry of the Truth—that is, every man in Christ Jesus. Thus all who, motivated by the Holy Spirit, exercise their privileges as ministers of the Gospel, are “one” in that endeavor through Christ Jesus.

Paul’s largeness of heart and attitude are again brought to our attention in his letter to the brethren at Philippi. Writing from prison in Rome, he said to these beloved saints, “I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; So that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; And many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: But the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.”—Phil. 1:12-18

What a marvelous testimony! Many in Paul’s difficult circumstances would have lost much of their interest in the service of the Lord, feeling

that the Lord had "put them on the shelf," and that therefore they had no further responsibility in connection with his service. It was not so with Paul. Even though chained to a Roman guard, (Acts 28:16,20) he continued to bear witness to the Truth, and rejoiced to learn that others were becoming more active in the Lord's service.

Paul had learned of some who were preaching the Gospel "even of envy and strife," and not with sincerity. His power and authority as one of the inspired apostles enabled him to know the motives of those who were endeavoring, by their preaching, "to add affliction" to his bonds. However, he did nothing to hinder these in their ungodly efforts. He simply said he rejoiced that, "whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached." How do we measure up to this attainment of love?

The situation was perhaps more difficult for Paul than it would be for us. He knew of the insincerity of those who endeavored to injure him. We cannot read the hearts of others, and should never try. We can only assume that all efforts to serve the Lord by proclaiming the Gospel are sincere. Believing this, we have no alternative but to rejoice in those efforts. Let us again emphasize that the point is not concerned with preaching error. No true child of God should, or can, rejoice over the preaching of error. Certainly Paul did not. However, Paul did rejoice, and so should we, to realize that the glorious Gospel of the kingdom is being preached, even though in some cases those who proclaim it "followeth not with us." "Love envieth not."

MOSES

Paul's attitude in this matter reminds us of an experience in which Moses likewise displayed a similar largeness of outlook. It is related in Numbers 11:25-29. Seventy elders of Israel were gathered around the Tabernacle by Moses, and the Spirit of the Lord came upon them and they began to prophesy. However, two of the elders remained in the camp, "and the spirit rested upon them; . . . and they prophesied in the camp." Joshua, who later became Moses' successor, called Moses' attention to this and asked him to forbid them. Moses replied, "Enviest thou for my sake? would God that all the LORD'S people were prophets, and that the LORD would put his spirit upon them!"

The point of this illustration is that Moses was not envious. Had he gone into detail he might have explained to Joshua that it really would have been better for those two elders to gather around the Tabernacle as the others had done in obedience to his instructions. However, since they did not do this, and the Lord saw fit to put his Spirit upon them, Moses did not intend to pout over the fact that they had been more or less disobedient to him. So far as he was concerned, he would be happy if God placed his Spirit upon all the Israelites and made them prophets. How similar this is to Paul's viewpoint while suffering as a Roman prisoner.

HEARTS ENLARGED

In his second letter to the brethren at Corinth, Paul wrote, "O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels."

(II Cor. 6:11,12) The Greek word here translated “straitened” is defined by Prof. Strong as “narrowness of room.” The *Weymouth* translation renders this text, “There is no narrowness in our love to you: the narrowness is in your own feelings.”

Paul was far beyond the Corinthian brethren as a whole in his largeness of heart. Since only some of them at one time claimed to be his followers, others must have been to a degree opposed to him. This did not matter to Paul. His heart was enlarged to take them all in, and, to the best of his ability, build them up in the most holy faith. Paul recognized, even as we should today, that among the followers of Christ there are various stages of Christian development. It would perhaps be ideal if all had attained the same degree of spiritual growth which we hope is true of us. However, this will never be the case while we are in the flesh. If some seem to exceed us, and the Lord blesses them more than ourselves, we are not to be envious. If others try our patience because they seem to lag behind in grace and knowledge, our hearts should be enlarged toward them.

We need each other—all the more as we “see the day approaching.” (Heb. 10:25) “The eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: And those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tempered the body together, having given more

abundant honour to that part which lacked.”—I Cor. 12:21-24

Let us endeavor, through prayer and a zealous application of the principle of love, not to be overcome with the spirit of envy and jealousy. Instead, Paul wrote, “Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.” (Phil. 2:3,4) If we recognize that in some or many respects our brethren in Christ are better than ourselves, and we are able to rejoice in their superior qualities, there will be no room in our hearts for envy or jealousy. May the Lord help us to attain to this high and blessed standard of love in our viewpoint and in our dealings with one another. ■