

“Love Does Not Envy”

“Love suffers long and is kind. Love does not envy. Love is not boastful; is not puffed up.”
—I Corinthians 13:4,
*Wilson’s Emphatic
Diaglott*

TRUE CHRISTIAN LOVE embodies the principle of unselfishness. It is not governed by emotion, although those whose hearts are filled and controlled by love are fervently stirred to action on behalf of others. Indeed, God

was moved by his unselfish love to give his Son to be the Redeemer and Savior of the world. Because love is based on the principle of unselfishness, it cannot be envious of others, nor of the good things which they enjoy.

Paul identifies love as a principal “fruit of the Spirit,” whereas envy he describes as one of the “works of the flesh.” (Gal. 5:19-23) He further writes, “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.” (vss. 25,26) Every follower of the Master should desire to be filled and controlled by the spirit of love, devoid of any reason to be envious of others. However, the human heart is “deceitful”

and “desperately wicked.” (Jer. 17:9) We need to be constantly on the alert lest we be deceived into the belief that it is proper under certain conditions to be envious of the God’s blessings upon others.

Envy and jealousy are very similar to each other, and Solomon wrote that “jealousy is cruel as the grave.” (Song of Sol. 8:6) If we permit its venomous fangs to penetrate our hearts, we are robbed of the peace and joy in the Lord which would otherwise be ours. We should not assume that we are immune from attacks by this cruel poison of jealousy. We not only are to guard our hearts, but through prayer seek God’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 AND ABEL

The Scriptures present us with a number of examples of individuals who permitted themselves to be swayed by jealousy, and of the evils to which it led. Cain is the first of these. While neither the word envy nor jealousy is used in connection with Cain, it was undoubtedly this particular aspect of sin, stirred by selfishness, which overcame him. The record states that he was “very wroth” over the fact that God accepted Abel’s sacrifice and rejected his. (Gen. 4:5) The Apostle John warns that we should, instead, “love one another,” and be “not 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 did not do so, but instead 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, MIRIAM AND MOSES

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 God 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

We are to be always conscious of the fact that the Lord hears what we say, and that he knows the thoughts and intents of our hearts. (Ps. 94:11; 139:23) 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 complaint that Moses

had married an Ethiopian woman was merely a ruse. 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 God's mouthpiece when they felt that they were just as qualified as he.

Being able to read their hearts, the Lord knew that Aaron and Miriam had 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, restored her and Aaron back into his favor and service.—Num. 12:5-14

SAUL AND DAVID

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, in physical stature, stood head and shoulders above his fellow Israelites. (I Sam. 9:2) Apparently, though, he had never been impressed with the idea that this made him any more important than others. Thus, 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?"—vs. 21

Saul, though, did not maintain this humble estimate of himself. He became so important in his own eyes that he presumptuously disobeyed the instructions of the Lord. Samuel reminded Saul that it was when he was "little" in his own sight that he had

been made king over Israel. 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 the Lord’s instructions. Accused of this, he blamed the sin on the people, but God held Saul responsible, and rejected him.—I Sam. 13:8-14; 15:17-23

As always happens when self-interest takes control over the life of one of God’s servants, Saul sought to conduct his rulership upon the basis of what would be best for him. God had rejected him but allowed his reign to continue for a period of time. Rather than make any attempt to change his heart attitude, Saul began to rule Israel as though God had nothing to say in the affairs of the nation. This was sure to lead to his further undoing, and in this retreat from God the ugly spirit of envy and jealousy took hold upon him.

Saul was renowned among the Israelites as a brave and efficient warrior. However, beginning with the slaying of the giant, Goliath, David’s reputation as a warrior increased and eclipsed Saul’s. The account states: “It came to pass, ... when David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine, that the women came out of all the 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, and in his jealousy sought to kill him. David was forced to flee from his wrath, while Saul hunted him as he would an animal. By contrast, David manifested no inclination to seek revenge against his persecutor. On one occasion, while hunting the object of his uncontrollable 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 had delivered David’s enemy into his hand. If David had the slightest trace of hatred toward Saul, this line of reasoning 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 acceptable to the Lord? David had a different and better view, which was based on the divine will. 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.”—vss. 9-11

How wonderfully did David thus display his faith in the overruling providences of God! While Samuel had anointed him as God’s choice to be the eventual new king of Israel, David was quite willing to await the Lord’s own due time to take over the reins

of government. He apparently held no resentment against Saul, even though he had been treated so unjustly by him.

In this experience of Saul and David there are valuable lessons for us. Most of God'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 a certain degree of prominence among the brethren. This is a real test. It could be that those who, to begin with, are "little" in their own eyes, may become proud, and in their pride become envious of others whom the Lord may likewise richly bless in his service.

David's generous and forgiving spirit was further demonstrated in the case of his son Absalom, who rebelled against his father and attempted to seize the throne from him. When Absalom finally lost his life, David wept in sorrow. We read, "The king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate, and wept: and as he went, thus he said, O my son Absalom, ... would God I had died for thee, O Absalom, my son, my son!"—II Sam. 18:33

Under such circumstances many would have expressed delight that a rival, even within one's own family, had been destroyed, rejoicing that God's judgments had surely fallen upon him. David, though, was not of that disposition. He was a man after God's own heart, and the qualities of his character included largeness, mercy, and the spirit of forgiveness. (I Sam. 13:14; Acts 13:22) There is no room for envy and jealousy in a heart that is thus filled with the spirit of the Lord.

JESUS' PERFECT EXAMPLE

Jesus is our crowning example along these lines. Prior to Pentecost, Jesus' disciples were too often concerned about who should have the preeminence among them. On one such occasion it is recorded, "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 given by the disciples to Jesus' lesson is most unusual. "John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, 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" within their own circle. Here, however, was a man outside their circle of fellowship, and surely Jesus would approve their show of authority toward him. It seems that the fallen flesh is prone, at times, to be self-important and intrusive.

Again Jesus told his disciples they were wrong. He had not especially invited this worker to serve him, but Jesus was not at all envious of what he was doing. Indeed, Jesus did not instruct his disciples to go out and cooperate with this individual, nor to try and bring him into their fellowship. The point to be stressed here, however, 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, leave him alone—the Master instructed. This is also a good lesson for us. The Lord of the harvest is so great and all-powerful that he is able to manage his affairs without our interfering with those who may not be serving just as we are, or with those brethren most closely in association with us.

To follow this example and instruction of Jesus does not imply that in any manner we are to compromise the Truth. It simply means that we are to go forward in the Lord's service as he has given us the opportunity, and not to be too concerned over the course adopted by others. The temptation to interfere, as the disciples did, does not necessarily imply an envious spirit. It could be, and perhaps most often is, merely the result of a misdirected zeal. Whatever the motive may be, however, Jesus said, "Forbid him not."

PAUL—ANOTHER EXAMPLE

In the Apostle Paul we have another wonderful example of the largeness of heart for which we should strive. In the church at Corinth there was much rivalry, which Paul said resulted from carnal, or fleshly, thinking. In writing to these brethren he pointed out the error of their position. Some in Corinth claimed that they were devoted to Paul, and others that they followed Apollos. However, 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 one.” The issue, rather, was rivalry over who was to be recognized as a servant of the Lord. 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, those who are motivated by the Holy Spirit to exercise their privileges as ministers of the Gospel, “are all one” in Christ Jesus, as it relates to that joyous opportunity of service.—Gal. 3:28

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 is here given! Many in Paul's difficult circumstances would have lost much of their interest in the service of the Lord, feeling that they had been "put on the shelf," so to speak, and therefore they had no further responsibility in connection with his service. Paul, however, though chained to a Roman guard, continued to bear witness to the Truth, and rejoiced to learn that others were becoming more active in the Lord's service.—Acts 28:16,20

Paul had learned of some who were preaching the Gospel "even of envy and strife, ... not sincerely." 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. Yet, he did nothing to hinder these in their ungodly efforts, leaving the judgment of their hearts in the Lord's hands. Paul simply said he rejoiced that, "whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached." How we should strive for such an attainment of love.

The situation was more difficult for Paul than it is for us. He knew of the insincerity of those who endeavored to injure him. We, however, 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. Viewing the matter in this way, we should rejoice in those efforts. Let us again emphasize that this point is not concerned with preaching error. No true child of God should, or can, rejoice in the preaching of error, for certainly Paul did not. Paul did rejoice, though, 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 may not be properly motivated. As our opening text states, “Love does not envy.”

Paul’s attitude reminds us of an experience in which Moses likewise displayed a similar largeness of outlook. Seventy elders of Israel were gathered around the Tabernacle by Moses, and God’s spirit 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, later Moses’ successor, called his attention to this and asked him to forbid these two from prophesying improperly. 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!”—Num. 11:25-29

The point of this lesson 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 God still saw fit to put his spirit upon them, Moses would not bemoan 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.

In his second letter to the brethren at Corinth, Paul wrote, “O Corinthians, our lips are unsealed to you: our heart is expanded. There is no narrowness in our love to you: the narrowness is in your own feelings. ... I speak as to my children—let your hearts expand also.”—II Cor. 6:11-13, *Weymouth New Testament*

Certainly Paul was far beyond the Corinthian brethren as a whole in his largeness of heart. Since only some of them had initially claimed to be his followers, others must have been, at least for a time, opposed to him in some degree. This did not matter to Paul. His heart was enlarged to take them all in, and to build them up in the most holy faith. He recognized, even as we should, that in the church of Christ all are at different 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 not be so while the church is in the flesh. If some seem to exceed us in growth, and God 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.

Now, more than ever before, we need each other. "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 harbor the spirit of envy. Instead, as 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. May the Lord help us attain this high and blessed standard of love in our viewpoint toward, and in our dealings with, one another. ■