

Envy: The Malaise Afflicting God's People

A friend asked, "Have you noticed that so many Christians seem to be discontented with their lot? That they envy the rest of the world, and maybe even resent a little having to live like Jesus?"

If this is true—and I know enough of my own heart to suspect it is—it's not a new phenomenon. The condition has been with us from early on.

The malady was voiced perfectly by the psalmist:

"I was envious of the boastful, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Psalm 73:3).

You and I suspect the psalmist may have been a bit too selective of the ungodly whom he chose to envy. But that's how we do it, after all.

Envy is Selective

All around the psalmist were wicked people living wretched lives, filling the jails, fighting and killing, fornicating and drinking themselves into early graves. Those people also are "the boastful" and "the wicked." But he focuses on none of those. The ones he admires and even envies are the "up and out," not the "down and out." Look how he describes them ...

- There are no pangs in their death. (Psalm 73:4)
- They are not in trouble like other people. (Ps. 73:5)
- They have an abundance of this world's goods. (Ps. 73:7)
- They speak against God and show no respect for sacred things, and seem to get by with it. (Ps. 73:8-9)
- They are always at ease; they increase in riches. (Ps.

73:12)

In short, those he envies have “got it made.” (My opinion is he has just described a lot of people who keep filling the society pages of my newspaper!)

After casting the envious eye toward his wealthy and ungodly neighbors, the psalmist begins to wonder if he has wasted his own time serving God. “Surely I have cleansed my heart in vain.” “All day long I have been plagued and chastened every morning,” he says, implying that it was all for nothing.

Let’s admit something up front: *It can be tough serving God.*

Sacrificing to get His message to the ends of the earth. Paying a tenth and more of our income. Giving up our Sundays (and many weeknights and frequently entire weeks!) for spiritual activities when we could be enjoying the lakes and rivers with our families. Being asked to pray relentlessly, to study God’s Word daily, and to do unnatural things like loving enemies, turning the cheek, and rejoicing in persecution—this is uphill living.

Downhill is more fun. At least, we think so.

Our children’s softball league plays games on Sundays, and frequently this involves travel. Yet, we have to go to church. Where’s the justice in this? Can’t I serve the Lord by seeing to my family’s needs?

Such selective envy of unbelievers breeds this kind of roaming discontent.

Roaming discontent is major trouble looking for a place to light.

It sounds harmless enough. *Discontent*. It’s not a deadly sin or anything. It’s never made the top-10 list of dreaded sins.

But don’t let that fool you.

Discontent is the root of 10,000 sins involving God's people.

Discontented with his lot in life, a minister embezzled funds from the church to buy a larger house. The discontented church secretary had an affair with a handsome member and caused a scandal throughout the town. A family simply dropped out of church altogether in favor of sports and travel. Meanwhile, large numbers of teenagers marked time until they were old enough to stop going to church.

David was discontented. "In the spring of the year when kings go out to battle ... David remained at Jerusalem." One evening, he couldn't sleep and was walking on the roof of his house. That's how he spotted a woman taking a bath. And got into big trouble.

Beware of getting bored in the service of the Lord, friend.

OK, now, let's return to the case of the discontented psalmist.

When we left him, he was struggling with envy of the wicked and more than a little displeased with God. He'd gotten to the point of considering spreading his battitude (i.e., bad attitude; smiley face goes here).

Then, he did something really smart.

"I went into the sanctuary of God. Then, I understood their end" (Psalm 73:17).

He took his discontent and displeasure (angst?) to the Lord.

And God showed him something.

God gave him a vision of hell, thus ending his sojourn into envy.

The psalmist says, "Then, I understood their end. Surely, You set them in slippery places; You cast them down to

destruction. ... They are utterly consumed with terrors." (Ps. 73:17-19).

When they died—peacefully, prosperously, with great fanfare and in celebration of their lives no doubt—their troubles had just begun.

We must not miss that. *At the moment of their death, their troubles had just begun.*

Few things will jerk God's people out of our lethargy and envy quicker than a vision of hellfire, the fate of all who denounce God and reject Him.

Do not be envying those who scoff at God and live for this world. They have bought into the greatest scam of the universe—that to live for the moment while ignoring one's eternal soul is smart—and for us to admire them and want to imitate them would be the height of foolishness.

Other ways God brings us out of our funk:

- By His presence. "I was so foolish and ignorant ... Nevertheless, I am continually with You; You hold me by my right hand. You will guide me with Your counsel, and afterward receive me to glory" (Psalm 73:22-24).
- By a glimpse of heaven. "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire besides You" (Ps. 73:25).
- By a strong testimony of faith in Him. "My flesh and my heart fail; but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever. ... It is good for one to draw near to God. I have put my trust in the Lord God, that I may declare all Your works." (Ps. 73:26-28).
- And therefore, by His Word. This 73rd Psalm is as good as it gets in dealing with a modern malady afflicting too many of the Lord's children.

Those who live in the Word of God rarely deal with this kind

of blue funk that we are labeling “discontent” resulting from envy of the more successful of the devil’s bunch.

“If you abide in me and my words abide in you,” our Lord said, a lot of things happen, among them: answered prayer (John 15:7), much fruit (15:8), and “you will abide in my love” (15:9).

Stay close, Christian. Those three words say it all. {eoa}

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