

You're Just Jealous

When envy invades a marriage relationship, the results are particularly tragic. Husband and wife, once a union of love and partnership, now compete for recognition and spiritual “one-upmanship.”

Typically, jealousy among spouses masks itself in legalism—creating discord and suspicion. It effectively destroys the potential for teamwork by fostering individual kingdom building rather than cooperation. Jealousy is commonly rooted in insecurity and is defined as that “peculiar uneasiness” we experience when we see others receive the attention we desire for ourselves.

When a spouse's insecurity is left undealt with, he or she will demand increasing measures of satisfaction from the other. Take for instance, the story of Sheila and her husband, Bob*.

Sheila became increasingly threatened by the influence of her seemingly unspiritual husband in their circle of religious friends. She'd had a long history of being “the spiritual one” of the couple.

In any social gathering, Sheila assumed the role of directing the conversation around her own spiritual experiences. Her friends would inwardly cringe at the thought of spending a long evening with her. At the same time, Bob's company was refreshing and regularly sought out.

Sheila began to complain that she was being ignored and rejected. She continually prodded Bob to be more “spiritual.”

In effect, Sheila was jealous of the fact that her husband held more influence in the lives of their Christian friends than she did. This cycle left her open to seek fellowship in intensely religious circles, where she was the primary

relational link instead of the two of them together.

Alienation and conflict between the spouses grew. Bob became less and less excited to participate in church activities, and Sheila became more desperate to be at every meeting.

Her jealousy of her husband burned like the fire Psalms describes (see Ps. 79:5). Before long she began suspecting him of being “emotionally unfaithful” and preferring the company of other women “in his heart.” When Bob refused to respond to Sheila’s manipulation, she fell into a series of illnesses that required him to stay close to home.

Her sickness exacerbated her imaginings and drove a wedge of resentment between the couple. Bob could never do enough to cooperate with or care for her.

Though she appeared outwardly to be the weaker of the two, in reality, Sheila was locked in a power struggle with her husband for control of her world and the people in it. She was driven by her own inadequacy and insecurity. In demanding to be of primary importance to her husband, she was smothering any flame of true affection between them and becoming the bane of his existence.

Solomon wrote: “Jealousy [is] as cruel as the grave; its flames are flames of fire, a most vehement flame” (Song 8:6, NKJV). In Proverbs, he described “three things that are never satisfied, four [that] never say, ‘Enough!’: the grave, the barren womb, the earth that is not satisfied with water—and the fire” (30:15-16).

Jealousy is the fire that never says “enough.” If left to burn, it will consume love, trust, fellowship and truth, leaving a wide swath of destruction in the same way that Satan’s envy of God became a fire of deception, rebellion and ultimate evil.

Envy Begets Suspicion

Jealousy has a close-knit fraternity of emotions that includes vain imagination, paranoia, anger, hatred and murder. The spirit of jealousy is impossible to appease, for it will “accept no recompense” (Prov. 6:35).

The spouse of a jealous person will be continually suspected or accused of wrongdoing. He will be required to give more and more frequent proofs of his devotion until the spirit of jealousy manipulates every aspect of the relationship’s dynamics.

Unfortunately, the following example is all too common in church circles. It concerns a pastor’s wife I’ve known, who was convinced her husband was being sought after by females in their congregation.

Any expressed concern for the other women in the church was always suspect to her. It made the pastor reluctant to share the details of his schedule with his wife, knowing that they would probably lead to draining discussions and confrontations.

The wife should have been a co-laborer with her husband, especially with regard to the other women in the church. However, due to her suspicions, he preferred to have her occupied elsewhere.

The requirements of this pastor’s duties would always put him in situations his wife perceived to be threatening. He dismissed her nagging and fits of rage as unjustified, but this only made her feel and appear more foolish.

Eventually, not even counseling could assuage his coldness. Nor could it reassure his spouse, who was convinced of her failure as a woman and a wife.

A relationship ruled by jealousy exists in a continual cycle of suspicion, accusation and rejection. Ultimately, constant discord destroys any real intimacy between the two partners,

who have become rivals.

Competition, Legalism and Confusion

Spiritual jealousy between spouses quickly leads to competition. It carries confusion and masks itself in religious legalism.

For example, a husband who envies his wife's spirituality might insist that a woman cannot practice certain spiritual gifts because they are "reserved only for men." Threatened by her influence, he may accuse his wife of being a "Jezebel" who is attempting to rule when she should submit.

Such was the case with a leader's wife I had occasion to meet. This woman spent a number of miserable years in confusion and depression under the burden of her husband's volatile insecurities and jealousy. Sadly, the stringent gender roles of their denomination served as a deceitful vehicle of unrighteousness in their personal dynamics.

At one time, this couple was certain that God had ordained them to share their spiritual calling in marriage. In public, she was the joyful, supportive, submissive, wife; inwardly, she felt completely stifled and used.

At church, the husband took the helm as the charismatic center of every event. At home, he was a self-consumed tyrant who used doctrinal laws of submission and obedience on his wife to his own benefit.

He required that her every ounce of energy be consumed with him. If she was unwilling to comply with his every whim, he would accuse her of rebellion.

This cycle continued, hidden behind the facade of religious piety. The wife's zeal for her husband and his vision cooled. In response, he began to suspect her of lusting after other men in their circle of acquaintances.

The alienation in their marriage made way for open conflict. He would become angry, accusing and threatening her.

Meanwhile, the dynamics of their situation were further affected by the fact that God began using her spiritual gifts in a way that gave her increasing public approval and influence. It became difficult to see where her husband's jealousy of her ended and his appreciation of her anointing began.

He made sure to exercise tight reign over her schedule and engagements in order to limit her interaction with others, especially if he wasn't going to be present. Ultimately, it took a miraculous visitation for the woman's husband to see himself in the mirror of the Word of God.

Slowly, the man began to relinquish his insecurities and enjoy the fact that God had given him a capable wife. The regrettable part of this story is that the couple spent many miserable years in captivity to the husband's jealousy, which he masked behind their religious roles.

When the anointing of God falls on someone, Satan takes opportunity through jealousy. This spirit makes the person who is afflicted by it its captive, then victimizes the people to whom he relates. But there is a way out.

Breaking Free of Envy

Jealousy can have power over you only when you give it a place in your life. If you are trapped in this vicious snare, practicing the following principles will help you to find freedom:

- *Love.* Love is not jealous; it seeks the welfare of others (see 1 Cor. 13:4-5).
- *Do not think more highly of yourself than you should.* See yourself and your spouse circumspectly (see Rom. 12:3).

- *Dethrone yourself.* Jealousy provokes vain imagining (see Ezek. 8:3). If having to be the center of attention puts you in competition with your mate, you have given way to a spirit of idolatry! You have become your own object of worship.

You will be subject to resenting, accusing and alienating your mate. Put Christ as supreme in your thoughts and behavior. Then your spouse's success and influence will cause you to rejoice.

- *Be aligned with the Word of God above your emotions.* A jealous spirit will cause you to misinterpret the actions and motives of your mate, as in the case of Michal, David's wife (see 2 Sam. 6:14-23).

Guard the truth in your heart, and discern your real image and that of your spouse. Do not give the accuser a foothold either by charging your spouse with evil or by receiving his or her jealous accusations.

- *Ask for more anointing from the Holy Spirit.* Although the spirit of jealousy hates it, the anointing is your power against these attacks. Take the stance David did when he replied to Michal rather than retreating into a cave as Elijah did (see 2 Sam. 6:21-22; 1 Kin. 19:9).

- *Know when to speak.* Submit to a spirit of jealousy, and it will demand more and more. But speaking the truth at the right time brings liberty.

A great antidote is a good sense of humor. Do not take yourself or your spouse so seriously that it immobilizes you or puts you in bondage through manipulation and fear.

- *Do not withdraw.* Bring jealousy to the light (see Prov. 18:1). Seek out a third party whose prayers and counsel you both can honor and receive.

Do not gossip about your mate under the guise of sharing this

burden with a prayer partner, especially if you have not confronted the problem or taken it to someone with pastoral authority for help.

- *Run after what the Lord has for you.* Then jealousy will run away from you (see Jer. 29:11).

- *Bring an offering to the Lord.* Whether you are innocent or guilty, Scripture indicates that an offering, made in faith, will break the stronghold of jealousy and set you both free (see Num. 5:14-15).

There are serious consequences for harboring a jealous spirit. So unrestrained is this evil that often God must supernaturally intervene to rescue its victims.

Avail yourself of His power and wisdom. Then love can flourish in your marriage again, and you can find the joy and peace that our selfless First Love, Christ, freely gives.

**Not their real names*

Bonnie Chavda is a member of the editorial advisory board of SpiritLed Woman magazine. A dynamic Bible teacher, she and her husband, evangelist Mahesh Chavda, conduct training seminars and crusades around the world. They are the pastors of All Nations Church in Charlotte, N.C.