

The Deceptive Power of Jealousy

✖ You don't have to live in the wild West to be susceptible to one of the most dangerous threats known to mankind: snakebite. In fact, snakebite is a particular problem in the church—in every climate and geographical setting. It strikes in every season, sending out its poison to hinder unity, blessing and spiritual power throughout the body of Christ.

The snakebite I'm talking about is jealousy, and it wreaks havoc by embroiling Christians in battles against one another. "What leads to strife (discord and feuds) and how do conflicts (quarrels and fightings) originate among you?" James wrote. "You are jealous and covet [what others have] and your desires go unfilled; [so] you become fight and war" (James 4:1-2, The Amplified Bible).

No doubt all of us know what jealousy is. We've been jealous of others, or we've felt the fury of someone's jealousy directed toward us. According to Webster's Dictionary, jealousy is the "passion or peculiar uneasiness that arises from apprehension that another enjoys some advantage we desire for ourselves." It is "being suspicious that we do not enjoy the affection or respect of others, or that another is more respected and loved than ourselves."

A person fueled by jealousy will take advantage of the failures, weaknesses—or perceived weaknesses—of the other party. That's the opposite of the love espoused by the apostle Paul: "Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Rom. 12:10; Phil. 2:3, NKJV).

The Father of Jealousy

Scripture makes clear that Satan is the father of jealousy. He is the snake with the bite! In his rebellion, he showed his jealousy toward God with his statement: “‘I will ascend above the will be like the Most High’” (Is. 14:14). One-third of the angels in heaven were persuaded to separate themselves from their brethren and follow his jealous revolt.

Sometimes we see the same thing happen in churches today when jealousy leads believers to bring accusation and judgment against other believers. We must recognize who is inspiring this discord: the old snake himself, Satan, whose bite of jealousy is poison to individuals, congregations and the church-at-large.

In fact, jealousy and accusation are the unique mark of the influence of the enemy—and perhaps the chief cause of damage to the body of Christ in our day. The Bible calls Satan “the accuser of our brethren” (Rev. 12:10). The Greek word for “accuser” is *kategoros*, which literally means “to speak against in court, before a judge in a public assembly.”

Satan is an excellent attorney for the offended, always looking for opportunity in some offense between Christians to plant and nurture the seed of jealousy. And if he finds transgressions, look out! He’ll use them to “justify” accusation and cause division, persuading believers to judge one another.

Even when there are no real transgressions, Satan often brings division by encouraging believers to accuse one another of suspected wrongs. This happened in a situation I knew about.

A few years ago God raised up a group of young, zealous churchmen in a certain city. These men had some among them who walked in unusual measures of the supernatural. People from around the world began to seek out their instruction and direction, and they became quite influential.

In the same city there was another church that had enjoyed primary spiritual influence before the anointing of the new ministry. When the new ministry began to eclipse the older, the leader of the older voiced first reservation, then suspicion, then opposition and ultimately accusation against the rising ministry. All the “differences” expressed were backed up by the accuser with sound reference to scriptural mandate and evidence of error on the part of the accused and their associates.

Fellowship and cooperation between the two ministries ceased. The formerly influential minister began to publish information on the “erroneous” teachings of the rising ministry. This information was used to create suspicion and accuse the young ministry of error, heresy, and even immorality. All the while the real deception was the religious case presented by the jealous accuser, not the teachings of the accused!

The end result of the controversy was that numerous lives and ministries were damaged. The positive influence of the new ministry was negated; people associated with both sides lost their reputations and suffered spiritually and relationally. It has taken years of revelation, confession, repentance, prayer and humbling for those churches, ministries and people to get back on track and be cleansed of the effects of jealousy.

This is only one example of the devastation that the spirit of jealousy leaves in its wake. Satan was jealous of God—and he drew one-third of the angels with him in his revolt. The Pharisees were jealous of Jesus—and they manipulated Judas’ own sin and weakness to bring Christ to the cross. When jealousy is at work, sin uses the power of logic and deception to make its case. Blinded to our own sin and Satan’s strategy, we feel justified in striking out at the offenses of others.

“If thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out,” Jesus said. “And if thy right hand offend thee, cut it off” (Matt. 5:29-30,

KJV). Notice He said thy. Too often we become offended at the “eyes” and “hands” of others. We seek to cut them off, as if we are doing a service to Christ in the process. In fact, we’re maiming His body!

We fall into the snare of the devil when we think we must step uninvited into the affairs of others in order to help God, defend His reputation or set others on the “right path.” Jesus must be our example.

Once a man came to Jesus demanding, “‘Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.’” But the Lord did not exercise His authority in the matter, recognizing the greed and jealousy at the root of the request. “‘Man, who made Me a judge or an arbitrator over you?’” He responded (Luke 12:13-14, NKJV).

Though He never compromised His own obedience, Jesus did not try to impose His will on others but rather gave people the liberty to make their own choices. How different from the leadership of the Pharisees in New Testament times—and from the leadership of many today!

Modern-day attacks on one another and debates between factions in the body of Christ rarely, if ever, depict the love we’re called to as followers of Jesus. In recent years, a number of Christian leaders and authors have gained fame by criticizing other leaders—even accusing those who, based on the fruit of their ministries, obviously have been anointed and approved by God. These accusations, which have caused ongoing strife in the church-at-large, do not spring from the Holy Spirit.

James instructs us, “Do not speak evil of one another, brethren. He who speaks evil of a brother and judges his brother, speaks evil of the law and judges the law. But if you judge the law, you are not a doer of the law but a judge. There is one Lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy. Who are you to judge another?” (James 4:11-12).

Unfortunately, too often those leaders who ought to be examples of love show little deference for one another. They—like the rest of us—are often suspicious and become insecure when others are blessed. We would do well not to be partakers of the serpent's jealous poison!

The Destruction of Relationships

One of the worst consequences of jealousy is the destruction of relationships—even among the closest of friends, co-workers, family members, and marriage partners. When jealousy is present, true fellowship is impossible.

“If we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another” John writes (1 John 1:7). If we harbor jealous feelings toward one another, however, we are walking according to the flesh (see Gal. 5:19-21), and our relationships suffer dramatically.

In the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32), jealousy rose up in the heart of the faithful son when the father chose to forgive, bless and even celebrate the return of the wayward prodigal. The older brother became the enemy of the returning brother and expressed anger toward the father who loved him, separating himself from fellowship and putting a damper on the reunion. Apparently he had not read Proverbs 18:1, which says, “He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom” (NAS).

Jealousy also ruined the relationship between another set of brothers, Cain and Abel. When Cain's offering to God was rejected and Abel's offering was accepted, Cain became jealous and boiled with anger. Scripture says “his countenance fell” (Gen. 4:5, NKJV).

When the spirit of jealousy enters the heart, darkness comes over the mind and emotions—and that's what happened to Cain. The result was the first sin of one human being against another: murder.

The Blessing of Unity

We live in an awesome hour. More than ever we are challenged to be led by the Spirit, to enter into communion with the Lord and with our brothers and sisters in Christ. The psalmist tells us, "Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!...For there the Lord commanded the blessing" (Ps. 133:1,3).

Jealousy separates and destroys. Love, on the other hand, produces unity and fruitfulness—it commands a blessing.

As we look to the heavens, longing for the refreshing of the Holy Spirit to bring in a great harvest and impart wholeness to the body of Christ, we must see that unity is a key to activating the hand of God. It's important to understand that the unity that will command God's blessing on His church will not come from our all becoming alike but from our learning to harmonize together in our differences!

Jealousy demands that any difference be a cause for accusation and offense; love understands that "if the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling? But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He there are many members, yet one body" (1 Cor. 12:17-20). Rather than allowing differences to stir up jealousy and judgment, it is the Lord's desire that "there should be no schism in the body, but that the members should have the same care for one another" (v. 25).

So how do we respond when jealousy arises in the hearts of others toward us? Remember, Jesus did not sit down with Judas, counsel him or try to circumvent his actions. He didn't try to persuade His accusers of His own innocence or good intentions. He just continued doing the work given to Him by the Father.

For our part, we are constrained by God to love one another and to seek and save those who don't have the light of Christ.

How simple but exacting is our commission! Let us arm ourselves, then, with love and devotion to God, to one another, and to the harvest. By this we can escape the poisonous strike of jealousy and its bitter results.

And what of jealousy in our own hearts? God is challenging His people today to recognize His voice and stop being blind followers of the traditions, doctrines and judgments of men. We must walk by faith and not by sight, allowing forgiveness and mercy to fill us and remembering the exhortation of the Lord, "With what judgment you judge, you will be judged; and with the measure you use, it will be measured back to you" (Matt. 7:2).

True agape love, the Bible says, is not jealous (see 1 Cor. 13:4-7). Ultimately, the antidote against snakebite is love manifested in repentance and humility; in esteeming others above ourselves; and in leaving judgment to the One who alone knows hearts and can judge all things justly.

Each of us must be diligent to identify jealousy in our own hearts and commit it quickly to the cross. We must forgive others who are jealous toward us, recognizing the true father of the spirit of jealousy, and stay focused. Only then can the church as a whole build itself up in love and do the critical work of harvest and healing God has prepared for this moment in history.

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