

**Sermon – Love Is Not Envious**  
**Sunday May 10, 2020**

Today we're talking about envy.

How many of you know that you can still envy even during COVID-19?

I remember our first Zoom staff meeting. I was so excited to see everyone again. I was so happy to see everyone's faces. But then I noticed something. Some of the staff looked so much better on the screen. And I'm not talking about their looks, cause I know we have a good looking team. I'm talking about the quality of their cameras.

The colour and lighting looked *amazing!* And then I look at myself. And I look all dark and patchy. And a small part of me *envied* those staff with their fancy Macbooks!

I realized that it's totally possible to envy even during COVID-19. We can envy:

- The beautiful homes we see behind the people in our Zoom calls.
- The attractive haircuts people are getting in quarantine.
- The fancy equipment people are using for their videos.

Envy is part of the fallen human condition. We struggled with it before the pandemic. We'll struggle with it during the pandemic. And we'll struggle with it after the pandemic.

Envy occurs throughout the Bible. Right at the beginning, do you know how the serpent convinced Adam and Eve to rebel against God? He got them to *envy* him. He said,

Do you know that God is actually threatened by you? That's why he won't let you eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. He's holding out on you. He knows that if you eat of that tree, you'll be just like him.

If that's what you want, that's fine. But you do know you could do yourself a favour by taking that fruit and eating it.

And that's exactly what they did. How did that work out? Envy led to the fall of the entire human race.

One chapter later, the pattern continues. Adam and Eve's sons, Cain and Abel present offerings to God. Abel's offering is acceptable, but Cain's offering isn't. So how does that make Cain feel? He envies his brother. So what does he do? Out of envy, he kills his own brother. Envy leads to the first murder.

And again, the pattern continues. Later in Genesis, we read the story of Joseph and his brothers. Joseph is the favourite of Jacob's twelve sons. He gets better treatment. He gets a fancier coat. He even gets his own musical. But how does this make his brothers feel? They envy their brother. So what do they do? They sell him into slavery. Envy leads to family separation and brokenness.

We're in a series these days called Love Is. We've been looking at that famous love chapter in 1 Corinthians chapter 13. We're unpacking this passage verse by verse to explore how we're called to love. So far we've looked at Love is patient and love is kind.

The original Greek word for the kind of love we're called to is *agape* love. Agape love is pure, sacrificial and unconditional. The ultimate embodiment of agape love is Jesus himself.

But there are two dangers whenever we call people to love like Jesus.

The first danger is that we don't even try. It sounds so idealistic and impossible. Sure, Jesus can love that like because he's God – but there's no way I could do that. So why bother.

The second danger is that we try to love like Jesus in our own strength. Maybe if I try harder, I'll be able to love like Jesus.

But both of these approaches miss the mark. Because the truth is, we can't love like Jesus. It's impossible. We can't do it on our own.

So how do we love others with agape love? The Bible says,

We love because he first loved us. (1 John 4:19)

You see, God is love and he created us out of love. This means that we were created to need God and to need what only God can give us. Just like you need food and drink to survive *physically*, you need certain things to survive *spiritually*. You need purpose, security, and a sense of *being loved*. And only God can give you this.

The truth is, **it's only as you experience God's love that you can love others like Jesus**. Think about a waterfall. A waterfall can pour out water only because it has water coming from another source. In the same way, we can only love others when God's love is filling up our hearts. Only then can his love overflow and pour out and into the people around us.

That's why sin is so serious. We often think of sin as "breaking God's rules". But sin is a lot more than that. Sin doesn't just break God's rules. **Sin blocks the flow of God's love**. It prevents God's love from filling your heart.

When that happens, you feel totally empty. You're not even thinking about loving others because you don't feel loved yourself. So what do you do?

You look to other things to fill your heart.

You look to other things to find life.

You create idols.

All this leads to envy. But Paul says, Love does not envy. We're going to explore this topic today by looking at three questions today.

1. What is envy?
2. What does it do?
3. How do you overcome it?

## 1. What is envy?

**Envy is a comparison game.** It sees life as a competition.

But you're not competing for a personal best or for pride in representing your country.

Instead, you're competing for a personal sense of worth.

You're trying to find your value by being better than others.

You're trying to prove your worth by beating others in the game.

But here's the problem. When you do that, there's only so much to go around. Because everyone else is trying to get the same thing. So it's basically survival of the fittest.

That's why life often feels like you're scraping for morsels. You want to prove that you're better than others, but what envy reveals is your own insecurity.

One Christian author says:

The envious person resents another person's good gifts because they are superior to his or her own. It's not just that the other person is better; it is that by comparison their superiority makes you feel your own lack, your own inferiority, more acutely. (Rebecca DeYoung)

Envy is always idol-specific. **We're most prone to envy those who are similar to us.** You don't mind if someone is better than you at something you don't care about.

For example, I don't care if someone has a newer phone than me, drives a nicer car or is better at fixing things. Those things aren't my game.

But back in high school, I did pretty well in school. I got awards, scholarships and affirmation.

But university was a whole new game. Many students were just naturally smarter than me. (I know that's hard for you to believe!) But some of them could stay up late the night before a test partying and still ace it.

I *envied* their natural smarts. Because being a good student had become my way of finding a morsel of self-worth. And these other students were getting the same morsel I wanted.

Those university days are long behind me now - but that doesn't mean I'm not still capable of envy. The difference now is that I'm not a student anymore, I'm a pastor. And in my darker moments, if I'm tired and not in a good place, I can notice envy rising up within me.

When someone gets more praise for his sermon.

When someone is more gifted and talented.

When someone's ministry gets more recognition.

I've never been resentful, but I have at times felt insignificant and not good enough. Even as a Christian, it's possible to find our self-worth in ministry rather than in Jesus. Which is actually worse, because we appear righteous.

Envy is a comparison game. It sees life as a competition. What game are you playing?

If popularity is your idol, then the person with more friends is your competition.

If looks are your idol, then the person who's better looking is your competition.

If your career is your idol, then the person in your field is your competition.

If being smart is your idol, then the person with more knowledge is your competition.

If family is your idol, then the person with the better family life, family vacations and the more successful children is your competition.

Envy is a comparison game. It sees life as a competition.

## 2. So what does envy do?

In 1 Corinthians 13, Paul says life is all about... what? Comparing yourself with others? Beating them in the game? No, he says life is all about love. If I do not have love, I am nothing. As Pastor Steve says, Life minus love equals zero.

It's only as you experience God's love that you can love others like Jesus. But envy like all sin, **blocks the flow of God's love. As long as you're envying someone, it's impossible to love them.** Why is that?

It's because love seeks the *good* of others and *rejoices* when they have it. But envy seeks to *destroy* the good of others and is *resentful* when they have it.

Just imagine how I felt in university. When people studied less me actually did better than me. Do you think I was happy for them?

Of course not! I wanted to beat them! (Not physically, just academically!) Because it wasn't fair! I worked harder. I put in more effort. I was more deserving.

Do you know what I secretly hoped? Deep down, I secretly hoped they would fail. That way, they would get they deserved and it would make me feel better about myself.

Do you see how dark my thoughts can get when I'm insecure? When I'm looking to idols for my self-worth? When I'm trying to beat others in the game?

That's what envy does. It blocks the flow of God's love. As long as I'm envying someone, it's impossible to love them.

That's why the Bible says,

A heart at peace gives life to the body, but envy rots the bones. (Proverbs 14:30)

Envy makes us bitter and resentful.

But do you realize that even if you win, you still lose. Why?

Because Jesus doesn't call you to beat your competition. Jesus calls you to love your neighbour as yourself. But you can't love someone you see as a threat.

So who is someone you see as a threat? Someone...

- Who's more ahead in life than you?
- Who's more talented than you?

- Who's more well-liked than you?
- Who gets more recognition than you?
- Who has a better family life than you?
- Who has an easier life than you?
- Who does more exciting things than you?
- Who has more stuff than you?

When you see life as a competition, not only can you not love your neighbour. Do you know who else you can't love? Yourself. Because...

You're too busy trying to prove your worth.

You're too busy comparing.

You're too busy to see that you're *already* loved.

Jesus calls you to love your neighbour as yourself. But when you envy, you can't do either.

Envy blocks the flow of God's love. As long as you envy, it's impossible to love.

### **3. So how do you overcome envy?**

First, **Quit playing the comparison game.**

This game is exhausting – aren't you tired of it yet?

Aren't you tired of having to start over every day?

Aren't you tired of fighting for that morsel of life?

And even when you get it, it doesn't last. You're still empty. You think it will fill you but it doesn't.

That's because it's all a lie. It's an illusion. The world calls winning the game... life. But Jesus calls it, death. He says:

For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me will find it. What good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul? (Matthew 16\_25-26)

On an episode of Oprah, her guest was a 40 year-old mother. She was envious - of all people, her 17 year old daughter. She envied her daughter's looks. So she wore the same clothes as her, put on special make-up and spent hours each morning competing with her daughter.

If you're a 40 year-old mom and you're competing with your 17 year-old daughter in looks, guess what? You're going to lose. Anyone watching that show would have said, Lady, just stop. Quit playing this game!

And that's exactly what Oprah did. She had the woman take off all her makeup for 48 hours. And guess what? She actually looked better.

So quit the comparison game. Not only is it dumb, but there's no way you can win. So opt out, get out and quit playing the comparison game.

Second, **get your life from Jesus.**

Envy is a comparison game. It sees life as a competition. But listen to what Paul says:

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation... I can do all this through him who gives me strength. (Philippians 4:11-13)

Jesus always went out of his way to lift up those who had no status and worth. It was his way of saying, Love isn't a competition. Love isn't based on your performance or special qualities. Love is a gift.

One Christian author writes:

In offering love, acceptance and value especially to these people, Jesus seems to be deliberately defying envy's competitive view of love and worth. God's love is noncomparative and unconditionally bestowed. (Rebecca DeYoung)

What would it look like to know that you're loved with a love that's noncomparative and unconditionally bestowed?

Paul prays this very thing for us in Ephesians chapter 1. He prays that the eyes of our heart would be opened to see what we *already* have in Christ. Because...

- Why envy someone's status, when you're the apple of God's eye.
- Why envy someone's home when Jesus has a mansion waiting for you.
- Why envy someone's looks when Jesus calls you his radiant bride.
- Why envy someone's riches, when you have a glorious inheritance in Christ.
- Why envy someone's clothes, when you're robed in Christ's righteousness.
- Why envy someone's success, when you have a crown of glory
- Why envy someone's promotion, when you'll co-reign with Christ.
- Why envy *anything* anyone has when in Christ, you're loved by God and you've been blessed with every spiritual blessing.

Quit playing the comparison game and get your life from Jesus. Why grasp for morsels, when in Christ you have a feast?

As a beloved child of God, everything you need you already have. In Christ, you're unconditionally loved so now you can love others without feeling threatened or diminished.

I want to leave you now with one practice to do this week.

Advertisers spend billions of dollars trying to get you to look at people who have *more* than you so you can *envy* them. What I want you to do this week, is to look at people who have *less* than you so you can *bless* them.

If you go to our COVID response page ([cornerstonechurch.ca/covid](http://cornerstonechurch.ca/covid)) there's a section that says I CAN HELP. You'll find different ways you can bless someone in need.

- Two weeks ago, our daughters gave up a month of their allowance to give to our COVID fund.
- Last week, they baked 400 chocolate chip cookies to feed the homeless.

If you come up with your own ideas, that's great too!

The main thing is to remember that it's all about love. If you don't have love, then you're nothing. You are blessed to be a blessing.

So quit the comparison game and get your life from Jesus. Because it's impossible to envy and love at the same time.