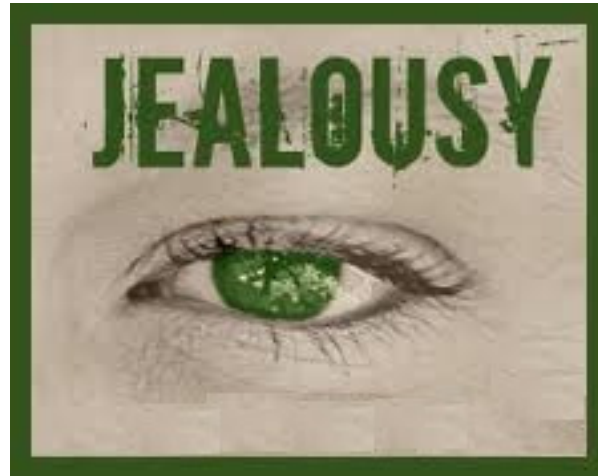


“The Green-Eyed Monster”



I have recently become convinced that the social networks (e.g. Facebook, Twitter, etc.) have the strong potential of becoming breeding grounds for jealousy and envy.

It was Shakespeare in his play, “*Othello*,” who referred to jealousy as “the green-eyed monster.”¹ The idea of being “green with envy” seems to have also come from this Shakespearian phrase. ‘Going green’ has become the mantra of environmentalists who emphasize the importance of taking care of the world that we live in. But to take care of the emotional and psychological and spiritual world that we live in, we cannot go green. In other words, for the health of our souls, we must avoid the green-eyed monster of jealousy and envy.

While there are certain distinctions involved in the meanings of these two words, “jealousy” and “envy,” I am referring to them interchangeably and synonymously. This jealous envy is an emotional response that occurs when a person sees what someone else has that they do not have, and as a result, they feel resentful or even angry about it. It might be someone else’s possessions, achievements, opportunities, abilities, appearance, or even relationships that instigates this emotional response.

For example, if you read on Facebook about someone else’s new car, does it bother you? You might even click the “Like” button. But inwardly, it begins to eat away at you. They’ve written about (or even worse, shared pictures of) their latest acquisition, their perfectly decorated house, their gorgeous family, their splendid weight loss, their latest vacation or dinner with friends. You know you should rejoice with them, but all you can muster is a feeling of inferiority and even envy. All you can think about is your own mundane, uneventful life filled with the struggles and frustrations that other people are seemingly

able to avoid or conquer. Can I let you in on a little secret? No matter how good that other person's life may seem, they are probably experiencing some of those same feelings of inferiority and envy.

For those of us in ministry, it might even involve how many attended the other church and how few were at our church. How many the other fellow baptized. How many revivals he is preaching, when nobody even knows your name. In 2 Corinthians 10:12, Paul in his wisdom told us how unwise it is to become part of that group of people who compare themselves to others, especially those "big shots" who "commend themselves." Paul said that we "dare not" do it.

I realize that by making these observations, I am perhaps making my own confession. I'll admit it; I have gotten "green around the gills" and struggled often with this thing of envy. I am very aware that I'm not a "big shot." I envy those who have greater opportunities and success than I have had. Honestly, I don't even feel adequate enough to be classified as a "little shot." There are many days when I just feel like I've been shot.

As I fight the battle with envy, I have to remind myself of the many Bible verses that speak of this blight on our spirits. A simple search in the concordance will direct your attention to passages in Romans, 1st and 2nd Corinthians, and 1st Timothy where "envy" is listed alongside such things as wickedness, drunkenness, strife, divisions, backbiting, slander, and even blasphemy and murder. You will discover that it was such envy that led to the *jailing of Joseph* according to Acts 7:9. It was envy that led to the *problems of Paul* in Acts 13:45. It was envy that led to the very *crucifixion of Christ* (Mark 15:9-11).

We find in Proverbs 27:4 that "wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is able to stand before envy?" One writer explained that "Envy is the condition of one who looks upon the happiness of another and longs to possess it. Envy generally seeks to conceal itself, and to work in secret and in darkness. Passion (the *wrath* and *anger* mentioned first) would strike down its victim in the public market-place, whilst envy would carefully weigh out and mix the poison for its victim to consume unconsciously in his food."² The Keil and Delitzsch Commentary on the Old Testament says of envy that "it incessantly ferments through the mind." A hidden poison that ferments and becomes increasingly sour and deadly; it's not a very appealing description for this thing of jealous envy, is it?

Let me mention one further scripture that speaks of envy. It is Proverbs 14:30 where the Bible says, "A sound heart is the life of the flesh: but envy the rottenness of the bones." F. C. Cook said that this "sound (or healthy) heart" here is one "in which all emotions and appetites are in a healthy equilibrium." He went on to say that "the contrast with this is the envy which eats, like a consuming disease, into the very

bones and marrow of a man's moral life."³ Unchecked envy in our hearts is like bone cancer. And for the diseased one, it is pervasive and painful and perilous.

If we are constantly focusing upon what we don't have that somebody else does have, it will destroy us. When the only thing you can see in your experience is the lack of fairness, the load of futility, the life of frustration; it eats away at you.

But before it claims one more pound of flesh, let us apply the radiation of revelation to this cancerous envy; another wise statement from the pen of Paul found in Galatians 5:26. He said, "Let us not be desirous of vain glory ... envying one another." When we make life all about us, we become self-conceited and desire the "vain glory." We resent that we don't have what someone else has. We envy them.

So how do we defeat this green-eyed monster? Well, it may not hurt to stay off of Facebook for a few days. But aside from that, we have to stop thinking about "poor old me." And we have to stop dwelling on how great "they" have it (or how great **we think** they have it). The emphasis can't be on me or them. We have to emphasize Christ. As John the Baptist said, "He must increase, but I must decrease" (John 3:30).

As the bard's character Iago said to Othello, "O, beware ... of jealousy; It is the green-eyed monster which doth mock." May God help us in our lives to bring down this monster jealousy and lift up our master Jesus! Amen.

¹ Shakespeare, *Othello*, Act 3 – Scene 3

² From "The Biblical Illustrator," notes on Proverbs 27:4

³ From the Barnes' Notes Commentary