

The Evil Eye

by Bryan Gibson

See if you can answer the following questions, all of which have the same answer. Why did Cain kill Abel? (Genesis 4:4-8; 1 John 3:11-12). Why did Joseph's brothers first conspire to kill him, and then sell him into slavery? (Genesis 37; Acts 7:9). Why did Korah, Dathan, and Abiram lead a rebellion against Moses? (Numbers 16:1-3; Psalms 106:16-18). Why did King Saul make numerous attempts to kill David? (1 Samuel 18:7-9; 18:28-29; 20:31). Why did the Jewish rulers deliver Jesus to the Roman authorities to be crucified? (Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10; John 11:47-48). The culprit in every case was envy, the "evil eye" Jesus speaks of in Mark 7:22 ("envy" in some translations).

Envy was a problem for these Bible characters, and it's still a problem—perhaps a bigger problem than we sometimes realize. We can become envious of those who make more money, those who are in a higher position, those who are more gifted, those who receive more praise, those who have better behaved children, etc. And because we're envious, we either treat them poorly, or we just don't treat them quite as well as we might others. They've done nothing to deserve this kind of treatment, mind you, but that's the nature of this sin—it makes us do and say crazy things.

Look again at the examples above. They illustrate at least three major points about envy (and its close cousin, jealousy). 1. Envy is a powerful force. When it gets rolling, it can wreak a lot of havoc—in families, in churches, in relationships in general. "Wrath is fierce and anger is a flood, but who can stand before jealousy?" (Proverbs 27:4). 2. Envy never stands alone—it will always be accompanied by other evils. "For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there" (James 3:16). 3. Envy may actually cause us more harm than the object of our envy. "A sound heart is life to the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones" (Proverbs 14:30). If you doubt that, just ask King Saul, whose envy practically consumed him. Sir Thomas Fuller once wrote, "Envy shoots at others and wounds herself." That's the truth, because the Bible confirms it.

Clearly then, envy has no place in the life of a Christian (Mark 7:21-23; Romans 13:13; Galatians 5:19-21; 1 Peter 2:1)—for the reasons given above, but also because it had no place in the life of Christ. You can't "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" and still have envy in your heart (Romans 13:13-14). It may have "once" had a place, when we were apart from Christ (Titus 3:3), but no more. It hurts us; it hurts the object of our envy; and it will cause our souls to be lost in hell.

So how do we get rid of it? First, get rid of pride, which is really the source of envy. "Let us not become conceited...envying one another" (Galatians 5:26). "But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts..." (James 3:14). Did you notice how the two are joined together? Secondly, love the way God intended—the very way Christ demonstrated. "Love does not envy" (1 Corinthians 13:4); what it does instead is "rejoice with those who rejoice" (Romans 12:15).