

ADMIRATION OR ENVY?

“Now there was a day when the sons of God came to present themselves before the Lord, and Satan came also among them. And the Lord said unto Satan, whence comest thou? Then Satan answered the Lord, and said, from going to and fro the earth, and from walking up and down in it. And the Lord said unto Satan, Hast thou considered My servant Job that there is none like him in the earth, a perfect and an upright man, one that feareth God and eschewed evil? Then Satan answered the Lord and said, doth Job fear God for nought? Hast not Thou made an hedge about him and about his house, and about all that he hath on every side? Thou hast blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land.

[Job 1: 6-10]

If you were asked to make a list of people that you admired, who would you likely mention? They are likely to be people that you respect and those who meet with your approval. Parents, spouses, children or siblings, mentors or heroes, friends and well wishers are likely to make some people’s lists. But, if you were asked to name those that you envied, the typical answer would likely be “NONE!” Does that suggest that we don’t envy anybody at all?

To admire is to regard another person with respect or approval. To envy is to resent another person’s success or advantages. When we gossip, we dwell more on those we envy than on those we admire. Colleagues (in business, work place or church, etc.), in-laws, especially mothers or daughters-in-law, are likely to dominate our gossip list. So, why then was our envy list above blank? That is the problem! We know that we have an envy problem but we are reluctant to admit it. We hide it because we don’t know that it is a cancer which the word of God has called “the rottenness of the bones” [Prov. 14:30].

Examine the encounter between God and Satan over Job. God concentrated on what He admired in Job: his fear of God and devotion to true worship. Satan, on the other hand, concentrated on Job’s blessings, which are a reward for being the servant of God. Satan appeared to have tried to hurt Job, to make him lose his blessings, otherwise, he would not have known that God had put a protective hedge around Job’s life and material blessings. Certainly, Satan did not admire Job. He envied Job. Satan resented his success.

Do you admire or envy others? Let’s find out in today’s lesson.

1. How do we know that we envy others?

What may start as admiration may gradually creep into envy. When Tiger Woods won his first major professional tournament, *The Masters*, in April 1997, other professional golfers might have admired the feat of a young man of colour. However, by the time he had wiped out all competition to collect all the major trophies in 2000-1, one could see that his competitors' countenance (while being interviewed on television) betrayed their envy.

It is the same thing with us. Here are some examples of how our envy manifests itself:

a) When we feel threatened by others' growing stature

Have you noticed lately that some people you used to call your closest friends (in the office, business, church or even family) have gone cold on you since your recent promotion or new and better job or higher ranking in the church hierarchy?

After David had killed Goliath, King Saul admired his courage and "would let him go no more to his father's house" [1 Sam. 18:2]. However, when the women composed and sang songs, which ranked David over the king, the admiration turned to envy:

And Saul was very wroth, and the saying displeased him; and he said, they have ascribed unto David ten thousands, and to me they ascribed but thousands: and what can he have more but the kingdom? And Saul eyed David from that day and forward [1 Sam. 18: 8-9]

It was for the same reason that the chief priests delivered Jesus to be crucified [Mk 15:10]. In Antioch, the Jews resented the success of Paul and Barnabas among the Gentiles for "when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy" [Acts 13:45].

b) When we wish others' success were ours

When you hear that your classmate or junior in high school (who is not necessarily more brilliant than you are) has passed at the first attempt the bar exams, which you have failed twice, how do you react?

Zedekiah was the head of the 400 prophets who had prophesied that if Ahab should go to war against Syria over Ramoth-gilead, that he would win. However, through a young prophet, Micaiah, God revealed that He actually wanted Ahab killed in battle. That was why He had allowed a lying spirit to give a false message through the 400 prophets. Zedekiah did not like it that

the limelight had shifted from him. So he went near the young man and “smote Micaiah on the cheek, and said, which way went the Spirit of the Lord from me to speak unto thee?” [1 Kgs 22:24]

Similarly, Haman was highly favoured before king Ahasuerus, Esther’s husband. He could boast of “the glory of his riches,” the “multitude of his children and all the things wherein the king had promoted him and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king.” But was he satisfied? “Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king’s gate” [Esth. 5:11, 13].

c) When we downplay or feel sad over others’ successes

“What a lucky fellow?” “She is highly connected.” Are those responses familiar to you when you hear a good report about others?

Cain hated Abel just because God accepted Abel’s offerings and rejected his own [Gen. 4:4-7]. Joseph’s brothers envied him just because their father loved him the most [Gen. 37:3-4, 11]. Miriam and Aaron envied their brother, Moses’ superior relationship with God, saying, “hath the Lord indeed spoken only by Moses? Hath He not spoken also by us?” [Num. 12:2].

d) When we exaggerate or gloat over others’ misfortunes or setbacks

Some of us may *instinctively* rejoice when we hear bad news about others, whether friends or enemies.

After Absalom had overthrown David, his father, Shimei from Saul’s family, cursed David as he went into exile, stoning him and saying, “come out, thou bloody man, and thou man of Belial. The Lord hath returned upon thee all the blood of the house of Saul” [2 Sam. 16:5-8]. As Jesus was dying on the cross, the Jews mocked Him saying, “Ah, Thou that destroyeth the temple, and buildest it in three days. Save Thyself, and come down from the cross” [Mk 15: 29-30].

e) When you deny others the respect or honour or position due to them

Some people may continue to see us as we were many years ago even if we have become top leaders in politics, business or church. Therefore, they would relate to us at their level rather than at our new status.

The people of Nazareth refused to see Jesus beyond being the carpenter’s son [Mk 6: 1-6], just to deny Him the honour He enjoyed everywhere else in Israel. Because Isaac “had possession of flocks and ... of herds and great store of servants,... the Philistines envied him.” Therefore, every well that he dug, they filled up in order to frustrate him [Gen. 26: 14-15]. Korah and his gang

rebelled against Moses and Aaron claiming, “ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the Lord is among them; wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the Lord?” [Num. 16: 3].

We see from the foregoing that it is quite easy to be envious of others without our realizing it. But it has dangers!

2. Dangers of Envy

(a) *It can lead to more grievous sins*

Cain killed his brother, Abel [Gen. 4:8] and Saul attempted several times to kill David [1 Sam. 18: 10-11, for example]. Since envy is of the flesh [Gal. 5:19-21] and is dominant among those who are not born-again [Rom. 1:29], it is the source of evil [1 Tim. 6:4] for we are not fighting against flesh and blood [Eph. 6:12].

(b) *It is heavily punished by God*

Miriam was struck with leprosy [Num. 12: 10] and the ground swallowed up Korah and his clique [Num. 16:31-32]. Haman was hanged in the gallows that he had built for Mordecai [Esth. 7:10].

(c) *It hinders spiritual growth*

Saul, an anointed prophet and king, wound up consulting mediums because his envy of David had shut him out of God’s presence [1 Sam. 28:5-7]. That is why Peter has advised believers to lay “aside all malice and all guile and hypocrisies and envies and all evil speakings” and instead “desire the sincere milk of the word, that we may grow thereby’ [1 Pet. 2; 1-2].

3. Practising Admiration: the story of David and Jonathan

(a) Admiration begins from the soul

Jonathan was the crown prince; that is, he stood the chance to succeed his father, Saul, as king of Israel. Therefore, David’s rising profile threatened him as much as it did his father. Yet, the first time that Jonathan laid his eyes on David, “the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David and Jonathan loved him as his own soul” [1 Sam. 18:1]. Nicodemus was a Pharisee and a ruler of the Jews. Therefore, the ascendancy of Jesus was a threat to his status. Yet, when he came to Jesus by night, he did so with admiration “for no man can do these miracles that Thou doest except God be with him” [Jn 3:2]. As evidence that his encounter with Jesus that night increased his admiration for Him, he was one Jewish leader who protested unfairness to Jesus by insisting on the rule of law (presumption of innocence until proved guilty) [Jn 7:50-52]. At Christ’s burial, Nicodemus

brought expensive gifts to anoint His body [**Jn 19:39-40**]. So, admiration begins from the spirit. It comes from God, not from the flesh.

(b) Seal it with a covenant

Jonathan and David sealed the love and admiration that they had for each other with a covenant, i.e., a spiritual agreement that involves the exchange of blood. Then, Jonathan took his valuable possessions, his princely robe and garments, sword and bow, and gave them to David [**1 Sam. 18:3-4**].

Jesus is the mediator of the new covenant [**Heb. 12:24**]. To show His love and friendship for us, He stripped Himself of His deity, shed His blood on the cross, and has thereby covered us with the robe of righteousness [**Is. 61:10**]. All He has now asked us is to keep His commandments and “this is My commandment, that ye love one another as I have loved you” [**Jn 15:10, 12**].

(c) Behave wisely

Now in princely garments, David did not go about flaunting his new status. Instead, he “went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely” [**1 Sam. 18:5**]. “The fear of the Lord is the instruction of wisdom and before honour is humility” [**Prov. 15:33**]. This is an important lesson for those of us who are the source of envy to others.

(d) Work for each other’s success

Thereafter, Jonathan always defended David before his father [**1 Sam. 19:4-5**]. He even staked his inheritance for David’s safety [**1 Sam. 20: 27-33**]. In turn, David wept over Jonathan when he was killed in battle [**2 Sam. 1: 11-27**], and took over the maintenance of Jonathan’s family when he became king [**2 Sam. 9:1-13**].

What lesson can we learn from the above story? If we do not walk in the counsel of the ungodly nor stand in the way of sinners nor sit among the scornful, we shall be like a tree planted by the river, and whatsoever that we do shall prosper [**Ps. 1: 1-3**]. If we are as successful as everybody else is, *and we are satisfied spiritually*, there will be little or no room for envy.

4. Turning Envy into Admiration

We shall all find the following advice useful:

(a) When you have the spirit of envy

- ✓ Yield your body and mind for God’s service [**Rom. 12:1-2; 1 Cor. 2: 14-16; 1 Cor. 6: 20**]

- ✓ Become humble [**Lk 14:11; Jn 3:27- 30**]
- ✓ See the glory of God in others [**Rom. 12:14-15; 1 Cor. 11: 7a**]
- ✓ Watch and pray so as not to fall into temptation [**Matt. 26: 41**]
- ✓ Fear God [**Prov. 14: 27**]

(b) When you evoke envy in others

- ✓ Behave wisely like David [**1 Sam. 18: 14-16**]
- ✓ Fear God like Joseph [**Gen. 39:7-9**]
- ✓ Be humble like Jesus [**Jn 13;2- 16**]
- ✓ Put on the whole armour of God [**Eph. 6: 10-17**]
- ✓ Show love and forgiveness to those that malign you [**Matt. 5: 43-48; Rom. 12: 17-21**]
- ✓ Use your success to benefit others [**Gen. 45: 4-8; 2 Sam. 9: 1-13; Matt. 10:8**]

5. Conclusion

Envy is a form of witchcraft, which has its root in the desire of satanic forces to kill or destroy those whom God has blessed. However, weapons directed at the children of God cannot prosper [**Is. 54:17**]. So, what then happens? When we throw an arrow of envy at others, it can return to pierce us in seven ways [**Deut. 28:7**]. Since we are most vulnerable when we attack, we are usually not prepared for the boomerang effect. Ask Miriam, Korah, King Saul and Haman. Admiration, on the other hand, comes from the heart of God. When we admire and rejoice with those who are more blessed than we are, God will promote us to join them [**Ps. 75:6-7**]. Therefore, let us choose life, not death.