

RANSOMED HEART

LOVE GOD. LIVE FREE.

May 2017

Dear Friends and Allies,

This month, I'd like to pick up on a subject we are discussing on our podcast in May. It's proving to be very profound and very helpful to us, and a lot of our friends. The topic is: Envy.

Let me begin with a question: What do the last presidential election, the rampant hatred we see in social media, the passion for justice, and the topic of envy all have in common? I believe part of the answer is, *The Triumph of the Offended Self*. How quickly offense occurs in this world we live in!

When mankind chose against God at the fall, we exalted Self in the place of God. You'll notice how seriously Jesus takes the matter when he said we must daily die to Self if we would be his followers, if we would be the sons and daughters of God. "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me" (Luke 9:23). We don't particularly like that part of the Christian invitation; notice the absence of any best-selling book entitled "Die to Yourself Every Day!" It's the self-life, by the way, that doesn't like the subject.

Now to be clear, what I mean by "the self-life" is the part of us that during a conversation is waiting for *our* opportunity to speak, *our* moment to be asked how we are doing; waiting for *our* opportunity to tell a story. It's that part of us that finds it difficult to rejoice when others rejoice. It's that part of us that is so easily offended when we feel we have even been slightly wronged. The self-life is the breeding ground for envy. Dorothy Sayers wrote,

It begins by asking, plausibly, "Why should I not enjoy what others enjoy?" and it ends by demanding, "Why should others enjoy what I may not?" Envy is the great leveler, if it cannot level things up, it will level them down; and the words constantly in its mouth are "my rights" and "my wrongs."

There is good reason envy has been listed among the Seven Deadly Sins for centuries. (This is a list compiled by thoughtful saints on those issues that are especially damaging to the soul.) In fact, envy is second on the list. Now, envy has two directions in our lives. First, there is envy that flows from within us. A good deal of research is emerging to demonstrate that those who spend more time on Facebook experience higher levels of envy (and unhappiness) than those who don't—or the simple reason that you are comparing your life to the happiness that is apparently available in the lives of your friends and acquaintances. I find it so tragic that the number one source of envy in social media is holiday photos. For some of us, simply seeing the joy of another human being is enough to elicit envy in our lives.

What has happened to our culture is that we have lost the ability to admire anything that is greater or better or higher than ourselves? But friends, admiration is the language of the Kingdom of God. We celebrate that gifted musician even though we know we will never attain their

brilliance. We celebrate that family, writer, leader, or athlete simply because of the glory of God that is reflected in them. We rejoice with those who rejoice. (Notice the difficulty of the older brother in the parable when he sees the Father's lavish grace on his prodigal brother.)

Envy cannot admire. Sayers goes on to say, "At its worst, [envy] is a destroyer; rather than have anybody happier than itself, it will see us all miserable together."

Which brings us to the other side of envy—the envy that comes our direction. It is a very damaging force, much more so than you may have realized. In fact, it is the warfare that envy releases in our lives that actually got us investigating the subject and led us to the podcast series. For not only does envy say "I wish I had what you do," but it quickly degenerates into, "In fact, I wish that you did not have it since I cannot have it. You have too much." Envy is a destroyer, and our enemy uses the open door of it as an occasion to come and steal the good things of our lives.

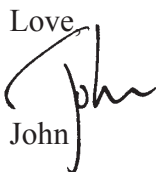
Now, you may not think that you are the object of anyone's envy, but let me assure you, your enemy holds an enormous grudge against you and envies you deeply. He envies your position as a son or daughter of God. He envies your relationship with him. He envies the blessings of God in your life. He envies your eternal destiny of absolute happiness and joy. Sadly, many people also give way to feelings of envy (as the research on social media proves). They envy your home, marriage, or children. They envy your position at work, or the fact that you get to live in the city you do. They envy your health or bright personality.

But most of all, we envy the blessings and gifts of God in others' lives.

Spiritual envy—envying the giftedness of another—is doing all sorts of damage in our souls, in our churches, and our Christian communities. It "partners" with the enemy to allow in division, and thievery; offense and backbiting; not to mention unhappiness. That's why we wanted to shine some light on it. Our culture has embraced the very toxic idea that everyone should look and feel and have exactly what everyone else has. That is not how the kingdom of God works! But boy oh boy is it a breeding ground for offense—the Offended Self. We can choose something so much better—we can choose love!

I hope you will tune into our four-part series on envy we offered this month (on the Ransomed Heart podcast). You won't regret it! In fact, this would be a great series to use to introduce the podcast to friends and family.

Thank you for rejoicing with those who rejoice. Thank you for celebrating the goodness of God wherever it appears in this world!

Love

John