

“Gratitude and Contentment”

The Apostle Paul urges Pastor Timothy to teach the doctrine – “the sound words of our Lord Jesus Christ and the teaching that accords with godliness ...” The Lord teaches and urges us this very night, saying – “Now there is great gain in godliness with contentment, for we brought nothing into the world, and we cannot take anything out of the world.”

In Proverbs 14:30, the Lord says: “A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.” What a graphic, yet proper, description of Envy. Envy is the type of sin that eats away at you – eats away at you from the inside out.

This gnawing desire within you is often not apparent to others as it consumes you from within. It’s not until you act upon your envy that people see it – and if you’ve ever seen an envious person – you know what I mean.

Like all other sins, the sin of Envy begins with the First Commandment – with a love of self – with living as if we are God. That may sound strange – that Envy is a love of self – when the envious person seems so consumed by another. But it is the love of the self you want to be – and being consumed with that self-made-image – that stirs up Envy.

So, what is Envy? It is the sinful desire for that which does not belong to you. And since all that you have is a gift from God – Envy is essentially the desire to have something that the Lord HAS NOT given to you – the desire to have something that the Lord HAS given to someone else.

In other words, the sin of Envy charges God with being a poor gift-giver. He has not given you the things you think should belong to you. He has given your gifts to your neighbor instead. It despises the gifts God has given, and has not given. It despises the Lord Himself.

Another word for Envy is “coveting.” The Ninth and Tenth Commandments speak directly to the sin of coveting. In the Ninth Commandment the Lord teaches you not to covet your neighbor’s house – that you are not to scheme to get the possessions of your neighbor – or to get them in a way that only appears right.

In the Tenth Commandment the Lord teaches you not to covet your neighbor's wife, workers or animals – that you are not to entice, or force them away, from your neighbor – or do anything that would turn them against him.

But why on earth would you ever do such a thing? Why would you scheme (make a wicked plan) to get your neighbor's property? Why would you cheat and steal to get something away from your neighbor, and do it in a way where everyone else is convinced that it truly belongs to you?

Why on earth would you plan, and connive, and plot, how to get your neighbors wife or husband, workers or animals away from him – either luring them away, or pushing them away from him?

Why? Because of the sin of Envy. It is Envy that lusts for your neighbor's physical traits, their beauty – his reputation in the community – her abilities – his worldly possessions – his or her spouse. As the god of your own life, you declare that these gifts ought to belong to you, not the neighbor – and so whatever action you take to get them are justified in your own mind.

The devil, the father of all lies, is a master of deception. He schemes, entices and forces his will. Rather than looking at your neighbor and rejoicing that the Lord has given them such good health, strength, an orderly home, possessions, wisdom, a good reputation, and the like – the devil leads you to resent the Lord and His good gifts.

The neighbor is despised, looked down upon. Rather than the best construction put on everything – the devil leads you to look for faults, to see everything in the worst possible light – to begrudge the neighbor any good that comes to him – convinced that none of this is GOOD until you get what you want.

And as Envy eats you away from the inside – it is doubly dangerous – in that it leaves no room to see and rejoice in the gifts that God HAS given to you. The devil has you so focused on the neighbor and his things – that the blessings you have are left to rot.

In the history of the Christian faith, Envy has been called the sin of perverted love. It is perverted because it loves what belongs to someone else – it loves what it cannot have. It is a love that cannot be satisfied.

Like Eve in the Garden of Eden – the eyes of Envy desire that which is forbidden – that which appears to be “pleasing to the eyes” and which is desired for eating and gaining wisdom – but the eating does not satisfy.

The constant, insatiable appetite of Envy is always looking at and coveting the things of your neighbor. That is why it has been called the sin of “wearing out of the eyes” – and with it comes, the rotting of the soul.

You might recall from last week that the remedy for Greed is the virtue of Generosity. Tonight, the Lord teaches us that the remedy for Envy is the virtue of Contentment. Contentment, along with godliness, “is great gain”!! This great gain, however, only comes when the sinful, god of my own life, self – dies.

So, the Lord uncovers the envy eating you away from inside out – so that you, the sinner, with all his envy, might be put to death. He condemns you and your sin – but He who suffered the condemnation of all sin, now forgives you.

The Lord of Life, by His forgiveness, resurrects you as a new man – so that you may see the gifts He has given to you – so that you may rejoice in them, give thanks for them – and with contentment, use them as He intends – as a blessing to you, and a benefit to those around you.

In this Season of Lent, the Lord Himself teaches you – developing in you the discipline of Contentment. In His love for you, He does not want you to live the unsatisfied life of constantly desiring that which you do not have. Rather than rotting away in Envy, He leads you into a life of Contentment.

In this life, you behold your Savior, who humbled Himself and set aside everything – His heavenly throne, His kingly glory, all the riches of Paradise, everything that is rightfully His – and finally His life – so that all that is His, He now gives to you.

There is no need to Envy others – for Jesus Christ has given you just what you need. He promises to daily and richly provide for all that you need to support your body and life. With the forgiveness of your sins, He gives you life and salvation.

What great gain there is in Christ Jesus, in whom you are content – great gain in this life, and for all eternity. Amen.