

B.07

From Envy to Submission

In Which We Submit To Our Place in God's Creation,
And Are Commended By Him

“Blessed are those who mourn, For they shall be comforted.” — Matthew 5:4

Envy is a close cousin to greed, though greed focuses on the thing desired while envy on the person who currently has it. It has been called the most miserable sin, since it doesn't cause even temporary pleasure to those who commit it!

Envy can be defined as resenting those who possess what we crave. In contrast, mourners have processed the painful truth that this life will never fulfill our deepest longings. But as we submit to our place in God's created order, we receive what the wise crave most: the comfort of His divine presence.

Assigned Reading:

Peter Kreeft: *Back to Virtue*

9. Blessed Mourner vs. Mourner at Others' Blessedness (Envy)

Dick Hockett: *Foundations of Wisdom*

3.6 (Modest) Example: Proverbs about the Tongue

Admonition: Proverbs 14

How does envy relate to folly?

- 1 *The wise woman builds her house,
But the foolish pulls it down with her hands.*
- 2 *He who walks in his uprightness fears the LORD,
But he who is perverse in his ways despises Him.*
- 3 *In the mouth of a fool is a rod of pride,
But the lips of the wise will preserve them.*
- 4 *Where no oxen are, the trough is clean;
But much increase comes by the strength of an ox.*
- 5 *A faithful witness does not lie,
But a false witness will utter lies.*
- 6 *A scoffer seeks wisdom and does not find it,
But knowledge is easy to him who understands.*
- 7 *Go from the presence of a foolish man,
When you do not perceive in him the lips of knowledge.*
- 8 *The wisdom of the prudent is to understand his way,
But the folly of fools is deceit.*
- 9 *Fools mock at sin,
But among the upright there is favor.*
- 10 *The heart knows its own bitterness,
And a stranger does not share its joy.*
- 11 *The house of the wicked will be overthrown,
But the tent of the upright will flourish.*
- 12 *There is a way that seems right to a man,
But its end is the way of death.*
- 13 *Even in laughter the heart may sorrow,
And the end of mirth may be grief.*
- 14 *The backslider in heart will be filled with his own ways,
But a good man will be satisfied from above.[a]*
- 15 *The simple believes every word,
But the prudent considers well his steps.*
- 16 *A wise man fears and departs from evil,
But a fool rages and is self-confident.*
- 17 *A quick-tempered man acts foolishly,
And a man of wicked intentions is hated.*
- 18 *The simple inherit folly,
But the prudent are crowned with knowledge.*
- 19 *The evil will bow before the good,
And the wicked at the gates of the righteous.*
- 20 *The poor man is hated even by his own neighbor,
But the rich has many friends.*
- 21 *He who despises his neighbor sins;*

- But he who has mercy on the poor, happy is he.*
- 22 *Do they not go astray who devise evil?
But mercy and truth belong to those who devise good.*
- 23 *In all labor there is profit,
But idle chatter[b] leads only to poverty.*
- 24 *The crown of the wise is their riches,
But the foolishness of fools is folly.*
- 25 *A true witness delivers souls,
But a deceitful witness speaks lies.*
- 26 *In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence,
And His children will have a place of refuge.*
- 27 *The fear of the LORD is a fountain of life,
To turn one away from the snares of death.*
- 28 *In a multitude of people is a king's honor,
But in the lack of people is the downfall of a prince.*
- 29 *He who is slow to wrath has great understanding,
But he who is impulsive[c] exalts folly.*
- 30 *A sound heart is life to the body,
But envy is rottenness to the bones.*
- 31 *He who oppresses the poor reproaches his Maker,
But he who honors Him has mercy on the needy.*
- 32 *The wicked is banished in his wickedness,
But the righteous has a refuge in his death.*
- 33 *Wisdom rests in the heart of him who has understanding,
But what is in the heart of fools is made known.*
- 34 *Righteousness exalts a nation,
But sin is a reproach to any people.*
- 35 *The king's favor is toward a wise servant,
But his wrath is against him who causes shame.*

Bible: 1 Peter 2-3

1 Peter 2

1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and all evil speaking, 2 as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that you may grow thereby, 3 if indeed you have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

4 Coming to Him as to a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God and precious, 5 you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ. 6 Therefore it is also contained in the Scripture,

*“Behold, I lay in Zion
A chief cornerstone, elect, precious,
And he who believes on Him will by no means be
put to shame.”*

*7 Therefore, to you who believe, He is precious; but to
those who are disobedient,*

*“The stone which the builders rejected
Has become the chief cornerstone,” 8 and
“A stone of stumbling
And a rock of offense.”*

*They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which
they also were appointed.*

*9 But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood,
a holy nation, His own special people, that you may
proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of
darkness into His marvelous light; 10 who once were
not a people but are now the people of God, who had
not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.*

*11 Beloved, I beg you as sojourners and pilgrims,
abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,
12 having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles,
that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may,
by your good works which they observe, glorify God in
the day of visitation.*

*13 Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of
man for the Lord’s sake, whether to the king as su-
preme, 14 or to governors, as to those who are sent by
him for the punishment of evildoers and for the praise
of those who do good. 15 For this is the will of God,
that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance
of foolish men— 16 as free, yet not using liberty as a
cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God. 17 Honor
all people. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the
king.*

*18 Servants, be submissive to your masters with all
fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the
harsh. 19 For this is commendable, if because of con-
science toward God one endures grief, suffering wrong-
fully. 20 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten
for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do
good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is com-
mendable before God. 21 For to this you were called,*

*because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example,
that you should follow His steps:*

*22 “Who committed no sin,
Nor was deceit found in His mouth”;*

*23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return;
when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed
Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself
bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having
died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes
you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray,
but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of
your souls.*

1 Peter 3

*1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands,
that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a
word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2 when
they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3 Do
not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the
hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— 4 rather
let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorrupt-
ible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is very pre-
cious in the sight of God. 5 For in this manner, in former
times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned
themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6 as
Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters
you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.*

*7 Husbands, likewise, dwell with them with understand-
ing, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and
as being heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers
may not be hindered.*

*8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for
one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courte-
ous; 9 not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but
on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to
this, that you may inherit a blessing. 10 For*

*“He who would love life
And see good days,
Let him refrain his tongue from evil,
And his lips from speaking deceit.*

*11 Let him turn away from evil and do good;
Let him seek peace and pursue it.*

*12 For the eyes of the LORD are on the righteous,
And His ears are open to their prayers;
But the face of the LORD is against those who do
evil.”*

*13 And who is he who will harm you if you become
followers of what is good? 14 But even if you should
suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed. “And do
not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled.”[1] 15
But sanctify the Lord God[m] in your hearts, and
always be ready to give a defense to everyone who asks
you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness
and fear; 16 having a good conscience, that when they
defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good
conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17 For it is better,
if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for
doing evil.*

*18 For Christ also suffered once for sins, the just for the
unjust, that He might bring us[n] to God, being put
to death in the flesh but made alive by the Spirit, 19
by whom also He went and preached to the spirits in
prison, 20 who formerly were disobedient, when once
the Divine longsuffering waited[o] in the days of Noah,
while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that
is, eight souls, were saved through water. 21 There is
also an antitype which now saves us—baptism (not
the removal of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a
good conscience toward God), through the resurrection
of Jesus Christ, 22 who has gone into heaven and is at
the right hand of God, angels and authorities and pow-
ers having been made subject to Him.*

Peter begins this section by listing envy as one of several ugly sins we should avoid:

*2:1 Therefore, laying aside all malice, all deceit, hypoc-
risy, envy, and all evil speaking,*

Interestingly, the rest of these are all things often done out of envy. This is one reason envy is considered a deadly sin: it inspires us to treat our neighbors badly. [C.1] Even if the resulting sins are largely petty, they still must be laid aside before we can appropriate what God has for us:

*2as newborn babes, desire the pure milk of the word, that
you may grow thereby, 3if indeed you have tasted that the
Lord is gracious.*

This is the surest antidote to envy: tasting the Lord's goodness to us. Once we understand how our deepest desires “have been granted in what he ordaineth” we no longer need to envy those who seem richer in the things of this world.

Our model for this is Jesus, who was stripped of all earthly possessions (cf. Matthew 27:35), yet is heir to all the treasures of heaven:

*4Coming to Him [as to] a living stone, rejected indeed
by men, but chosen by God [and] precious, 5you also, as
living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy
priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God
through Jesus Christ. 6Therefore it is also contained in the
Scripture, “Behold, I lay in Zion A chief cornerstone, elect,
precious, And he who believes on Him will by no means be
put to shame.”*

This passage is key to understanding both the cause and cure of envy. Underlying envy (and many other sins, as we will discuss later) is shame, the feeling of being dishonored (or dishonorable). Shame has been an integral part of the human condition since Adam's transgression — we have more creative tools than fig leaves for covering it up!

Envy typically arises when we see someone else blessed or honored with something we feel we deserve or need [C.2]; often it is something we believe will increase our status and security within society — i.e., take away (or at least hide) our shame of rejection and inadequacy.

God is calling us to die that “fear of man”, and instead find our identity as part of His kingdom. In contrast to our self-destructive attempts to ingratiate ourselves into the world, accepting our place as “living stones” in God's temple is the only safe way to avoid shame!

This means accepting (and mourning) our rejection by the world, as we follow in the path of Jesus:

7Therefore, to you who believe, [He is] precious; but to

those who are disobedient, “The stone which the builders rejected Has become the chief cornerstone,” 8and “A stone of stumbling And a rock of offense.” They stumble, being disobedient to the word, to which they also were appointed.

Yet worldly rejection is a small price to pay to be chosen by God [C.3]:

9But you [are] a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people,

Not that the glory of chosen-ness should to go our head — but rather to our Head!

that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light; 10who once [were] not a people but [are] now the people of God, who had not obtained mercy but now have obtained mercy.

It is only when we accept our identity as God’s chosen people and receive His mercy that we are able to fight for our souls:

11Beloved, I beg [you] as sojourners and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts which war against the soul,

For we fight not just for ourselves, but for God’s glory among the nations:

12having your conduct honorable among the Gentiles, that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may, by [your] good works which they observe, glorify God in the day of visitation.

Ultimately, the only life that makes sense is one devoted to seeking God’s glory. Which is why we can no longer covet glory from the world or for ourselves if we want to understand God’s perspective on submission:

13Therefore submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake,

This is a hard saying, especially for those of us who

grew up in Western democracies believing that “God made us to be free” and “government requires the consent of the governed.” [C.4] The crucial point is that we need to obey secular laws for His sake, not our own.

Why?

whether to the king as supreme, 14or to governors, as to those who are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers and [for the] praise of those who do good.

The radical truth implied here is that all human authority is established as a reflection (however imperfect) of God’s supreme authority, rewarding virtue and punishing evil. TO be sure, actual rulers don’t always live up to that high calling, and sometimes even do the reverse — as Peter himself well knew (cf. Acts 5:17-42)!

Yet that doesn’t change the essential legitimacy of human government, and God’s command to honor it:

15For this is the will of God, that by doing good you may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men— 16as free, yet not using liberty as a cloak for vice, but as bondservants of God.

In our flesh, it is easy to find excuses to ignore human laws we consider unjust or inappropriate: after all, are we not free in Christ? Yet that is no excuse for engaging in sin, or acting rebelliously. Instead, we should:

17Honor all [people]. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honor the king.

Note how Peter, when he felt God called him to disobey the religious rulers of his day, not only told them to their face what he intended, but willingly — even joyfully! — submitted to their prescribed punishment (cf. Acts 5:41). In doing so, he showed respect for their position of authority even as he disagreed with the persons in charge.

This is why Peter has the moral authority to command slaves to suffer (and mourn) the same way he did:

18Servants, [be] submissive to [your] masters with all fear, not only to the good and gentle, but also to the harsh.

19For this [is] commendable, if because of conscience toward God one endures grief, suffering wrongfully.

Because he believes God is worth it, and will honor them for it:

20For what credit [is it] if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this [is] commendable before God.

Since after all, this is how Christ lived — and died:

21For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22“Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; 23who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed [Himself] to Him who judges righteously; 24who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed.

For lest we forget, His unjust suffering was on our behalf:

25For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

Is it then too much for Him to ask us to bear unjust suffering for His sake? [C.5]

Once we accept that we must submit to imperfect human authority out of respect for God's divine authority — and mourn the unjust suffering that often accompanies such submission — we can better understand how this dynamic works in marriage:

3:1 Wives, likewise, be submissive to your own husbands, that even if some do not obey the word, they, without a word, may be won by the conduct of their wives, 2when they observe your chaste conduct accompanied by fear. 3Do not let your adornment be merely outward—arranging the hair, wearing gold, or putting on fine apparel— 4rather let it be the hidden person of the heart, with the incorruptible beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which

is very precious in the sight of God. 5For in this manner, in former times, the holy women who trusted in God also adorned themselves, being submissive to their own husbands, 6as Sarah obeyed Abraham, calling him lord, whose daughters you are if you do good and are not afraid with any terror.

Wifely submission is here recommended for the same reason as other kinds of submission: to i) win the hearts of unbelievers, ii) earn God's commendation, and iii) demonstrate that we fear God rather than man.

7Husbands, likewise, dwell with [them] with understanding, giving honor to the wife, as to the weaker vessel, and as [being] heirs together of the grace of life, that your prayers may not be hindered.

Significantly, husbands are not told to ask for (much less demand!) submission; rather, they are told to honor their wives as joint heirs, out of fear of the Lord.

For even though God has ordained the roles of king and subject, master and servant, husband and wife, in His eyes we are all equal as persons — and as such, must do good to one another:

8Finally, all [of you be] of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, [be] tenderhearted, [be] courteous; 9not returning evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary blessing, knowing that you were called to this, that you may inherit a blessing. 10For

“He who would love life And see good days, Let him refrain his tongue from evil, And his lips from speaking deceit. 11Let him turn away from evil and do good; Let him seek peace and pursue it. 12For the eyes of the LORD [are] on the righteous, And His ears [are open] to their prayers; But the face of the LORD [is] against those who do evil.”

For what harm is there in doing good?

13And who [is] he who will harm you if you become followers of what is good?

Well, actually there are those who will harm us for

pursuing what is right — but even that is all to the good:

14But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, [you are] blessed. "And do not be afraid of their threats, nor be troubled."

Not that we should be brazen and court danger; just be prepared, in all humility and fear of the Lord:

15But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts, and always [be] ready to [give] a defense to everyone who asks you a reason for the hope that is in you, with meekness and fear;

So that if and when we are punished, we can know that it is unjust:

16having a good conscience, that when they defame you as evildoers, those who revile your good conduct in Christ may be ashamed. 17For [it is] better, if it is the will of God, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil.

For those who suffer, mourn, which makes us eligible to receive God's comfort — a greater reward than all the worldly pleasures we are tempted to envy.

Conversation

1. Have you ever consciously envied someone? Why? With what result?
2. When has someone else receive an honor you felt you deserved? How did you react?
3. Share about a time someone "chose" you. How did it make you feel?
4. How would you reconcile Peter's command to submit "to every ordinance of man" with his decision to "obey God rather than men" in Acts 5:29?
5. Are you able to rejoice when you suffer unjustly? Why or why not?

Decision

- Repentance: Whom do you resent or envy that you need to release?
- Action: What current suffering do you need to fully mourn before God?
- Worship: How can you more deeply taste the Lord's graciousness?

Explore More

Click the links below (in onscreen PDF)

- Envy - International Standard Bible Encyclopedia
- Sermons From First Peter - Jesus: Cornerstone, Or Stumblingstone? (2:4-10)
- 9. Christian Submission (from A.W. Pink's The Life of Faith)
- Marriage as Unjust Suffering 1 Peter 3:1-7
- YouTube - Praise to the Lord the Almighty

For Next Week

For next week, read Matthew 18.
Why must we forgive?