

PROVERBS: THE WAY OF WISDOM

ENVY & CONTENTMENT

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot. — Proverbs 14:30

Read: Proverbs 24:17-20

In the book of Proverbs, envy is a coin with two sides. From one angle, envy is embodied by our hatred, grumbling, and despair at the good fortune of another. When someone experiences a blessing in their life, we can take it as a personal offense, an affront against our own self-worth. In this way, envy is the cousin of pride. It can't help but look at everyone through the lens of comparison, seeking to drag them down to our level. We longingly look at the person who has what we want, whether riches, relationships, or something else. Inwardly we say, "You're not better than me." But we don't really believe it. Instead of rejoicing with those who rejoice, we feel inferior and resentful.

On the other side of the coin, envy desires the perceived "good life" of another such that we compromise our values. Now, to be sure, it is an honorable thing to admire the good qualities we see in the wise, godly, and good person. In such cases, we *should* seek to imitate their way of life. But Proverbs regularly warns us not to envy the wicked and thus be enticed by them to sin. This idea is more fully fleshed out in Psalm 73.

The psalmist has spent his entire life trying to honor God, and as a result, he has walked through suffering, pain, and poverty. But the wicked seem to be care-free and prosperous. Everything goes well for them, and they don't even have to worry themselves with God's commands. The Psalmist cries out, "All in vain have I kept my heart clean and washed my hands in innocence" (Ps 73:13). But then, he enters the presence of the Lord. At that moment, his envy begins to lose its grip. He can finally see clearly. His vision of the good life shifts from "present prosperity" to "eternal life with God." With the Lord continually beside him, he is content and at peace.

What else could we possibly want? If we have God, we have everything.

Discussion/Reflection

We want to apply God's wisdom to transform how we think, feel, and act. The following questions are meant to stimulate conversation, correction, and change.

1. **Proverbs describes envy as a rot in the bones. Is that something you've ever experienced in yourself, or maybe seen in another?** Take a few moments to talk about that experience and the damage caused by envy.
2. **Is there a place in your life where you are uniquely tempted towards envy?** What could this teach you about what you ultimately value and see as "good"?
3. **Read Psalm 73:23-28. According to this passage, what can we do to fight envy and grow in our contentment?**