

ample of *meekness* quench in me all sparks of *anger* and *revenge*, and work in me such a gentleness and calmness of spirit, as no provocations may ever be able to disturb. Lord, grant I may be so far from offering the least injury, that I may never return the greatest any otherwise than with prayers and kindness; that I, who have so many *talents* to be forgiven by thee, may never exact *pence* of my brethren; but that, putting on mercy, meekness, and long-suffering, thy peace may rule in my heart, and make it an acceptable habitation to thee, who art the Prince of peace; to whom, with the Father and Holy Spirit, be all honour and glory for ever.

## SERMON XXIII.

### ENVY.

1 Cor. xiii. 4.

Charity envieth not.

ALL the passions *originally* implanted in human nature are innocent in themselves; and when directed to their proper objects, and kept within due bounds, become instruments of good to man, and of glory to God. This is the case with hope and fear, with love and hatred, with joy and sorrow, and with anger. *Envy*, however, appears to be altogether evil—to be made up of malignity and baseness; and, as such, could never have existed in a state of innocence.

*Envy* is a secret displeasure of mind, at seeing another person possess some advantage which we ourselves have not, or, at least, have not in the same degree. It inclines those who are under its influence, to wish that the prosperity which has excited it, may be in some way lessened; and too often shows itself in attempts to lower the character, or in some way to injure the prospects of those whose success has given birth to it.

In this there is something so base, something so unworthy not only of a Christian, but of a *man*, that hardly any one will acknowledge, even to himself, that he is actuated by so hateful a passion. I fear,



however, that it prevails too generally. There are but too many persons, who cannot see another getting on in the world, especially if he was originally of the same rank and in the same circumstances with themselves, without feeling some sort of vexation. When any good fortune unexpectedly happens to a man, there are always some persons disposed to *grudge* it to him, and inclined to find out some reason why he ought not to have met with it. We often witness among the poorer classes of society, a most amiable and praiseworthy readiness to assist each other in distress; in the time of sickness or other calamity, they will perform the kindest offices without any expectation of reward in this world. But often these same persons cannot see or hear of a gift, or other instance of kindness, bestowed upon a neighbour, especially upon one whom they choose to think less deserving than themselves, without feeling angry, both with him who gives and him who receives the benefit; and at the same time inclined to run them both down. To him who confers the kindness, they impute some unbecoming motive; or, at all events, a blameable weakness, and a want of fairness or discernment in not doing the same by them; and him who receives it they charge with some meanness, or unworthy compliance. How many too are the persons, who, being placed by Providence in that state of life which depends on daily labour for daily bread, look with an evil eye on all that are exempted from the necessity of bodily work, and not only murmur against God, because others have, as they think, so much, while they have so little, but *envy* them their affluence, and secretly rejoice when they meet with losses, or when any calamitous want brings them down to a level with themselves. From the same bad principle proceeds much of the disaffection to established government,

and of murmuring and repining against "the powers that be."<sup>a</sup>

The working of this evil passion shows itself in our earliest years. Infants unable to speak, cannot bear to see any trifle given to another if they are passed over; and little societies of children, brought together either for instruction or for amusement, feel something of *envy*, if any one of their number is distinguished by peculiar marks of kindness, and are perhaps disposed to run him down as a favourite. Even among brothers and sisters, who ought to be so dear to each other, an indulgence granted to one, is often sufficient to occasion dissatisfaction to the rest; who, instead of taking pleasure, as they ought to do, in a brother's good, feel displeased and angry, both with him and with the parent or friend by whom the indulgence has been given.

We are ashamed to acknowledge, even to ourselves, that we are influenced by any feeling so base as *envy*; but are we entirely free from it? Let us suppose a man, whom we thought inferior to ourselves, or, at least, upon the same level, and in the same situation, becoming decidedly superior to us in some qualification upon which we prided ourselves, or in some outward advantage;—in riches, for instance, in the good will and favour of man, in honour and reputation;—are we able sincerely to rejoice in his success? Do we feel no secret desire to see him checked in his career of prosperity, and descending again to the same level with ourselves? When we hear another commended for some quality in which we imagine ourselves to excel, or for the display of some talent, or the performance of some praiseworthy action, do we never feel any inward workings of pride, which make us feel as if the praise bestowed upon him was a sort of blame

<sup>a</sup> Rom. xiii. 1.



to ourselves—which makes us, in short, *envy* him the approbation he receives? Do we feel no lurking wish to throw in something to his disparagement, something to lessen the commendation given? We naturally should blush to confess this; but let us consider honestly, whether any thing like this is the case with us or not. The mere existence of such a feeling in the bosom is evidently mean and sinful;—but if it shows itself in word or action, it increases in guilt.

Perhaps what has been said may have been sufficient to convince you that envy, in a greater or a less degree, is a vice by no means uncommon. Let us now consider more particularly, how great and sore an evil it is.

And, in the first place, it is clearly and directly contrary to *charity*,—charity, that distinguished grace, without which all other seemingly good qualities are absolutely worthless: *charity envieth not*. Instead of envying, the Christian love of our neighbour takes pleasure in whatever good happens to him, as if it happen to ourselves. It rejoices, and rejoices sincerely, with those that do rejoice;<sup>b</sup> is glad to see them prosperous, and getting on in the world, even though it is itself left behind in a lower and less advantageous station.

Being thus contrary to love, *envy* is to be looked upon as one of the worst marks of the corruption of our nature. It is represented as such by the Apostles. Thus St. Paul speaks of the unconverted heathen as “full of *envy* and murder,”<sup>c</sup> as “living in malice and *envy*, hateful, and hating one another.”<sup>d</sup> He exhorts the Roman Christians to “walk honestly—not in strife and *envying*;<sup>e</sup>” and warns the Corinthians,<sup>f</sup> and the Galatians, that so

<sup>b</sup> Rom. xii. 15.

<sup>e</sup> Rom. xiii. 13.

<sup>c</sup> Rom. i. 29.

<sup>f</sup> 1 Cor. iii. 3.

<sup>d</sup> Titus iii. 3.

far as there was among them envying and strife, so far were they to consider themselves as in an un-renewed, an unchristian state. St. Peter affectionately exhorts us to lay aside “all malice, guile, and *envies*;<sup>g</sup>” and St. James tells us, that if we “have bitter *envying* and strife” in our hearts,<sup>h</sup> we can hardly pretend to be Christians, without lying against the truth; “for,” continues he, “where *envying* and strife is, there is confusion, and every *evil work*.”<sup>i</sup>

*Every evil work*, according to St. James, may proceed from envy; and the evil of envy will appear in a still stronger light, if we go on to consider some of the sad effects which proceed from it. When *envy* is not restrained, either by religion, or by humane feelings, or by shame, it produces the most melancholy consequences. It leads those who are under its influence, to do what they can to blacken the characters of those whom they envy, and to lower them in public estimation. Sometimes it proceeds even farther than this, and incites them to deeds expressive of their malevolent and envious feelings. It seems to be with a reference to its tendency to work on in the *dark*, in order to accomplish the depression, or even the destruction, of him by whose seeming prosperity it has been excited, that the wise man says, “Wrath is cruel, and anger is outrageous; but who is *able to stand before envy*?”<sup>k</sup>

I will not pretend to enumerate, or to describe, all the evil consequences produced by *envy*, but will confine myself to those which are particularly mentioned in Scripture.

The first crime, the first calamitous event, recorded in Scripture after the fall of man, is the murder of Abel by the hand of Cain;—the death

<sup>g</sup> 1 Pet. ii. 1. <sup>h</sup> James iii. 14. <sup>i</sup> James iii. 16. <sup>k</sup> Prov. xxvii. 4.



of a brother, by a brother's hand. "And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous." <sup>1</sup> Few parts of the Bible are more familiar to us, and more interesting, than the story of Joseph; and much of this story hinges upon his being sold by his brethren into Egypt. But what was it that induced them to take this step, to do this deed of cruelty and unkindness so unnatural? It was *envy*. "The patriarchs," says St. Stephen, "moved with *envy*," "sold Joseph into Egypt."<sup>m</sup> They envied him the favour which his father showed to him, and his coat of many colours; they envied him also on account of his dreams, his supernatural revelations from on high, and the high rank which those revelations foreboded. *Envy* took possession of their souls, and entirely overpowered the natural affection which they ought to have felt towards a brother; and kept them from reflecting, that by their cruelty towards him, they were not unlikely to bring down their father's grey hairs with sorrow to the grave. Indeed the first introduction of sin and misery among men, is ascribed in the Book of Wisdom to the *envy* of the evil spirit. "Through *envy* of the devil came death into the world."<sup>n</sup> The devil *envied* man the happiness which he enjoyed in Paradise from the favour of his Maker, and his *envy* led him to endeavour to destroy that happiness by tempting man to sin.

When our blessed Lord came into the world, to repair the mischief occasioned by the author of evil, he was interrupted in his blessed work, and persecuted by the Jewish rulers. And what was it that induced them to adopt this line of conduct? *Envy*. They envied him his holy life and his influence with the people; and when, in order to

<sup>1</sup> 1 John iii. 12.    <sup>m</sup> Acts vii. 9.    <sup>n</sup> Wisdom ii. 24.

accomplish his destruction, they brought him before Pilate, Pilate himself is said to have known, that it was through *envy* that they delivered him to him.<sup>o</sup> So again, when, after his death, his chosen followers began to preach the glad tidings of salvation, the same malevolent feelings obstructed them in their work. In the fifth chapter of the Acts, the high priest and they that were with him were "filled with indignation,"<sup>p</sup> or, as it is in the margin, "with *envy*," at the influence which the Apostles acquired by their miraculous cures, and successful preaching. Again, in the thirteenth chapter, we read that the Jews which believed not, "were filled with *envy*,"<sup>q</sup> and by their *envy* were induced to speak "against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting, and blaspheming." And on a like occasion, in the seventeenth chapter, *envy* appears to have carried them on to deeds of actual violence.

From that time to this, similar effects have been constantly produced by this evil and hateful passion.

And now, my friends, can it be necessary that I should produce any additional motives for persuading you to be very much on your guard against *envy*, and very earnest in your endeavours and prayers to suppress it? If additional motives are necessary, I might mention the uneasiness, the pain, which this passion occasions to the person himself who is influenced by it. He who gives way to it, is *indeed* his own enemy. Instead of deriving pleasure, as he ought, and as he might, from all the good which he sees around him, it becomes to him the source of bitterness and vexation of spirit; and his only delight is in the losses and calamities of

<sup>o</sup> Matt. xxvii. 18; Mark xv. 10.  
<sup>q</sup> Acts xiii. 45.

<sup>p</sup> Acts v. 17.  
<sup>r</sup> Acts xvii. 5.



those to whom he ought to wish well. Like an evil spirit, he rejoices in evil for evil's sake. How painful and corroding envy is, when it takes possession of the soul, may none of us ever know by sad experience. "Envy," says the Scripture, is "the rottenness of the bones."<sup>s</sup> Of all the sore maladies to which suffering human nature is exposed, one of the most dreadful is the *rottenness of the bones*; that disease which seizes on the bones, the stay and support of the body, consumes them in secret, and from them extends to the rest of the system. To this sad malady is *envy* compared. It gnaws the inmost heart, and makes the soul pine and waste away in silent anguish. It is on this account that envy was styled by one of the fathers of the Church, the most unjust, and, at the same time, the most just of all the passions; the most *unjust*, on account of its contrariety to all that is good and reasonable, and the mischief which it does to others; the most *just*, because it is sure itself to inflict just and severe punishment on him that is guilty of it.

And after making a man miserable in this life, envy, if unsubdued, and allowed to keep possession of the heart, will exclude him from heaven in the world to come. Envy is expressly mentioned as one of those works which have this sad effect; and we may be sure so malevolent a feeling can find no place in the regions of love, and peace, and joy.

I am confident, my friends, that we must all most sincerely wish to keep ourselves free from this base and wretched passion, which is thus destructive of happiness, both in this world and the next. In order to be preserved from it, we must watch and pray—*watch* with much care, and *pray* with great earnestness—that we may be delivered from this temptation. In addition to the arguments against

<sup>s</sup> Prov. xiv. 30.

it, which I have mentioned, let us consider how absurd and unreasonable it is in itself. For what can be *more unreasonable* than to feel as if you were worse off than you were before, because another is better off? to be angry and out of humour with any man, because he happens to meet with some good fortune; or, to speak more properly, because he receives some advantage from the goodness of Providence? As partakers of one common nature, and one common redemption, we are all members of one body, and whatever good happens to any part, happens in fact to the whole; so that if one member is well off, all the other members should naturally rejoice with it.<sup>t</sup>

Endeavour to feel in this manner yourselves, and to impress these sentiments on your children. Accustom them to see a brother, or sister, or a play-fellow, occasionally partakers of indulgences, from which they are debarred themselves, without being vexed at it. Teach them that instead of being displeased and *envious*, they ought to be glad at whatever good they see, even if they have no part in it; and that their enjoyments are not less than they were before, because others seem to have greater.

You must be sensible that nothing would more tend to check and prevent envy, than cultivating a spirit of real good will towards men in general. If we love our neighbour as ourselves, we shall, as I hinted near the commencement of this discourse, be as glad when any good happens to him, as when it happens to ourselves. *Charity envieth not.*

In order, too, to check envy, we must nourish in our bosoms a genuine feeling of *humility*. Almost all the evil passions have their birth, or their growth and increase, from *pride*; and envy, in particular, gathers strength, if it does not in the first

<sup>t</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 26.



instance arise, from a conceit of our own worth, from the presumptuous idea, that he whom we envy is less deserving than ourselves. If we have a low opinion of our own worth in the sight both of God and man, we shall not be uneasy at being in a low station, or in meeting with but few advantages.

We should do well, too, to fix our attention upon the blessings which we have actually received, and to feel thankful for them in our hearts, instead of envying those conferred on others, and being angry both with them, and with him by whom they were bestowed.

If we could acquire the habit of looking upon all temporal advantages as comparative trifles, of really setting our hearts and "affections on things above, not on things on the earth," we should be in little danger from envy. Things that have little weight or value in our esteem, would never be capable of exciting in our hearts this restless and uneasy passion.

If, at any time, you should unhappily feel any emotions of envy springing up in your bosom, at all events, be careful not to give vent to them by any unkind words or actions; least of all, by saying any thing to the disadvantage of him by whose success they have been excited. Let us rather be anxious, in an unconstrained manner, to show him all tokens of kindness. The giving utterance to envy will be apt to increase and strengthen it, while it will naturally be lessened by kindness of behaviour.

Above all, let us pray fervently to God that he would restrain and check within us all the evil workings of *envy*. Let us implore him that he would remove from us "all strife and envying," as well as "bitterness, wrath, and malice;" and that he would shed abroad in our hearts still larger and

larger measures of that Spirit, whose distinguishing fruits are love, joy, peace, long-suffering, and goodness.

### THE PRAYER.

(From the Whole Duty of Man.)

Lord, grant that I may never look with murmuring on my own condition, nor with *envy* on that of other men. Give me such a contempt of mere earthly riches, that whether they increase or decrease, I may never set my heart upon them, but that all my care may be to be rich towards God, and to lay up my treasure in heaven: that I may so set my affections on things above, that when Christ, who is my life, shall appear, I may also appear with him in glory. Grant this, O Lord, for the merits of the same Jesus Christ.