

# se7en: Envy

Reconnect – April 5, 2009

**Text:** I Corinthians 11:17-34; Matthew 21:1-16; Luke 22:14-24

**Key Thought:** Envy disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote: a connection with God that brings health, life and joy. “Envy wrecks everything”

For this is what the Lord himself said, and I pass it on to you just as I received it. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, saying, “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant between God and you, sealed by the shedding of my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it.” For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again. So if anyone eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, that person is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. (I Corinthians 11:23-28, NLT)

## Intro: “Envy wrecks everything”

- “Envy wrecks everything”
- Celebrating the achievement of a friend – enjoying your newest purchase – thinking about your family, your children – reflecting on your career – giving God thanks for His goodness in your life
- Envy wrecks everything – all of these amazing moments in our lives and more – envy exists only to ruin those, and to make you doubt, question, belittle, downgrade, and disdain every good thing in your life
- Your best friend gets promoted – it’s everything they’ve wanted for a long time – more than that, you know that they do a good job, they’re a decent person – if anyone deserves it, it’s them – and they’re going to be able to use that new responsibility and position to continue to do a great job and even try to help people along the way
- So why do we think about our best friend and tell ourselves, “They’re not that great – I could do better than they are” – and ironically, it doesn’t matter if we have twenty years of wisdom on that person or not, or if we even like what they do for a living
- Envy says to us that if we don’t either go after or dismiss what they have, that we don’t matter – that we can’t be satisfied or fulfilled without putting a pin in a butterfly and pinning it in a book

## Three sections, one theme:

- If you’re still not sure about my envy theory, take a look at all the different Bible passages we read this morning – because in each account, envy wrecks everything
- Jesus comes into the city, and the religious leaders, who have never had a parade in their honour, well, they envy him – same with the Last Supper – the disciples can’t even listen to Jesus talk without being concerned about who is the greatest, and no sooner does he tell them that he’s going to die, then there they are, right back at the shop talk – so, who do you think is going to be in charge when the boss fixes everything up for us?
- And then envy in the account that was just read – the envy that has a group of people dividing themselves into haves and have-nots, snobs and underlings, factions and divisions and strife (more about that in a minute)

## Envy:

- Envy – I don't want what God has given me, God is not doing a good job with me, my life, my situation – I could do better – I would make myself like THEM
- Envy – tearing down someone else out of jealousy, while wanting to be them at the same time – simultaneous desire and disgust, which just tastes like bitter sand – if lust is like cancer, then envy is like an infection, a sore that oozes every time you poke it
- Envy: being unhappy with someone else's success or happiness or good fortune – we're unhappy with what we have, and we're upset that someone else is doing better than we are – we wish it was ours, or we wish that they were as miserable as we are
- Envy is the one of the seven deadly sins that is no fun – it offers no satisfaction – it is merely spiting or wishing spite to someone else – it's bitterness in your mouth and sand in your shorts

Envy's double whammy:

- 1) Envy wants to hurt others
- 2) Envy makes us look bad/small to others

Advertising – you have to have what they have – Celebrity – you can be just like them, have what they have

At its heart, envy isn't really about another person: it's about you and God

- Why isn't God loving me enough to help me like He helps THEM? Why don't I have what I WANT/NEED/DESERVE?
- It then moves from God to the person in question

On envy: "we don't want to be equal" – our insecurity will not let us believe that we could be the same and still loved, still good, still gifted, still unique, still distinctive – as God sees us and as we see ourselves – look at me look at me look at me look at me

## The Opposite of Envy: The Lord's Supper

- Which is the opposite of what we're going to be doing together in a few minutes this morning
- You can call it many things: Eucharist (grateful, thankful), Lord's Supper, Breaking of Bread, Mass (dismissed), Holy communion (sharing, mutual participation), sacrament (a sacred, set-apart mystery)
- Through ups and downs, civilization and anarchy, plenty and want in the last 2000 years, all over the world, the simple ceremony of the Lord's Supper has endured
- It's been called different things, given different meanings and significance, even had different items used in it – but it has stood the test of time
- There have been times when everyone in the room has had a Bible, times when the Bible wasn't in a language that anyone present could read or understand, and even times when no-one had a Bible – and yet, this act of remembering persists
- At times it has even turned into something else: magic, a mark of exclusivity, a members-only privilege, a political statement, a divisive free-for-all, a proof of orthodoxy, a grace delivery system
- And yet, it was meant to be the closest thing to experiencing heaven on earth

## **Explain the text: I Corinthians 11:17-34**

**But now when I mention this next issue, I cannot praise you. For it sounds as if more harm than good is done when you meet together. First of all, I hear that there are divisions among you when you meet as a church, and to some extent I believe it. *[sarcastically]* But, of course, there must be divisions among you so that those of you who are right will be recognized!**

- “more harm than good is done when you meet together” – can you imagine? It’s THAT bad
- “there are divisions among you” – this is the key to understanding the rest of the section – the people of this community of faith are divided, and some people – maybe most of them – are looking for some kind of recognition, looking to be right – and looking to make sure that the others are clearly identified as WRONG

**It’s not the Lord’s Supper you are concerned about when you come together. For I am told that some of you hurry to eat your own meal without sharing with others. As a result, some go hungry while others get drunk. What? Is this really true? Don’t you have your own homes for eating and drinking? Or do you really want to disgrace the church of God and shame the poor? What am I supposed to say about these things? Do you want me to praise you? Well, I certainly do not!**

- “It’s not the Lord’s Supper” – it’s about their own suppers!
- As far as we can tell, the earliest churches celebrated the Lord’s Supper – they took bread and wine – as part of a larger event, a meal together that was called a “love-feast”, or an “acceptance dinner”
- This would be a pot-luck, hosted by a wealthier family in the church – remember, there are no church buildings, only people’s homes and meeting places – so it would be a pot-luck, celebrated regularly, and you’d bring your food, and the idea was that you would eat with others, build that community, have that friendship and sharing, and then at the end of the meal, you would celebrate the Lord’s Supper – you would take bread and wine together in remembrance of Jesus, who had brought you together in His love and acceptance, and brought you out of darkness into His light
- It was a beautiful thing, and it was one thing that the surrounding society couldn’t get over: that these Christians turned the social classes upside down – you would have slaves and free, rich and poor, men and women side by side, worshiping together, praying, equal and loved and valued – that to belong to Jesus changed everything else
- Unfortunately, that wasn’t happening here – the divisions, the class rivalry was definitely in effect
- It seems like the rich people, the cool people, were having a separate time of their own, where the “rest of the people” weren’t invited – a members-only affair, with better food and drink
- They would start beforehand, and be three sheets to the wind in a feast by the time the working stiffs could get there
- There was no thought for them of sharing their food – if you only could bring a little, well, that was yours, and this was mine, so too bad – but we’re all here in loving togetherness!
- Paul says that’s a load of hooey – it’s not Christian, it’s pagan – it’s got nothing to do with remembering Jesus, because He was nothing like that
- Envy wrecks everything

**For this is what the Lord himself said, and I pass it on to you just as I received it. On the night when he was betrayed, the Lord Jesus took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it, saying: “This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.” In the same way, he took the cup of wine after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant between God and you, sealed by the shedding of my blood. Do this in remembrance of me as often as you drink it.” For every time you eat this bread and drink this cup, you are announcing the Lord’s death until he comes again.**

- Paul is summarizing what we read earlier this morning, from the biography of Jesus written by Luke – who was actually a friend and a coworker of Paul’s
- They’ve overcomplicated it – and they’re missing the point – so he takes them back to basics – this is a loaf of bread, this is a cup of wine – you eat it together, not to fill your belly, but to act out the sacrifice of Jesus
- Communion is coming together at the Table as equals, focused on Christ, His love and what He’s done
- There’s this whole time-shifting dimension to this act:

### **Communion**

**Past ← Present → Future**

**Jesus’ death    Us, now    God’s kingdom**

- There’s been a lot of debate over the centuries as to what actually happens when this Lord’s Supper is celebrated – what does Jesus mean when He says it’s his body, his blood?
- Does He mean that it really is his physical body? His literal, actual blood? That somewhere along the line, it changes into those things? Probably not – because if you had asked the disciples that night at dinner where Jesus’ body was, they would have pointed at him, not at the bread on their plates
- But it’s understandable where that came from, because as the years went on, society collapsed, and you had people who knew only a very little about the Bible, about God, celebrating this, and being very influenced by the religions and beliefs of their cultures – not to mention that this is a very spiritual act, and they could no doubt feel a closeness to God as they did this – so they read it literally
- Others have said that, okay, it doesn’t go quite that far, but it’s still mystical – that when you pray over the bread and the wine, that Jesus’ presence is in it and shot through it, even if it’s still bread and wine
- They took that position because while they didn’t want to believe that it was literal flesh and blood, that they still weren’t ready to give up their tradition and belief to see it merely as a symbol
- And yes, still others believed it was only a symbol – only a picture, acted out, of what the love of God had done
- What’s the real answer? Does taking communion get you to heaven? A “means of grace”? Who’s right in all of these opinions?
- Does it matter? Because no matter what you believe this morning or how you grew up taking it or not taking it, or if you’ve never heard of this before this morning – it is a spiritual act – you are remembering the greatest moment in history, and it’s a conduit from your heart to God’s – you can’t help but think about His death and love for each of us and not be filled with more of God, inspired and changed

**So if anyone eats this bread or drinks this cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner, that person is guilty of sinning against the body and the blood of the Lord. That is why you should examine yourself before eating the bread and drinking from the cup. For if you are eating and drinking yet not honouring the body, you are eating and drinking God's judgment upon yourself. That is why many of you are weak and sick and some have even died.**

- When I was growing up, I remember hearing this part of this section quoted again and again, once a month, on the first Sunday of the month, when at the end of the service, our church would take communion – people in suits would hand out trays of little plastic shot glasses filled with grape juice, and other trays filled with little pieces of unsalted soda crackers
- But before they would, the minister would quote this section and tell everyone to “make it right with God” before they went any further
- And this wasn't a bad thing – there's nothing wrong with getting right with God
- But unfortunately, if you were struggling with some kind of sin that you couldn't seem to get a handle on – if you were already convinced of your shortcomings – you never really felt like you should be taking communion
- Instead of joy, you felt fear – instead of acceptance, you felt condemnation, instead of love, guilt
- People would feel it was their duty to NOT let others take communion, who hadn't convinced them that they were living for God, thinking that if they did take communion, that they would go to hell because of it – and they had noble motives – but they were mistaken in their understanding of God
- Why would a God who loved people enough to turn heaven upside down and die on a cross, then send people to hell for not getting a ritual right? Something wasn't right – someone had missed the point
- Listen to what Gordon Fee has to say – he's written the definitive commentary on this section of the Bible, and he's a Canadian, too, even coming from the same sort of background as me:

As noted throughout, this paragraph has had an unfortunate history of understanding in the church. The very Table that is God's reminder, and therefore his repeated gift, of grace, the Table where we affirm again who and whose we are, has been allowed to become a table of condemnation for the very people who most truly need the assurance of acceptance that this table affords – the sinful, the weak, the weary. One does not have to 'get rid of the sin in one's life' in order to partake. Here by faith one may once again receive the assurance that 'Christ receiveth sinners.'" (Fee, I Corinthians, 566)

- Imagine being part of a family where dinner was only served to the members who were currently having a good day – or a good week – or a good month – or a good year – and dinner would not be served to those who were going through difficulty, who were making mistakes, who weren't living up to their potential. Children's Aid would soon be called in, because kids would be starving to death. A parent doesn't deny their child food, no matter how they're behaving – they are still welcome at the table, provided they wash their hands and don't kick their siblings, and unplug their iPod.
- And yet, when we come to Jesus' table, we imagine that somehow our heavenly Father, our perfect parent, would fail to extend the same common love and grace

- The “body” referred to here by Paul is the church – a common metaphor to describe a community of Christians is “the body of Christ” – where he’s in charge, he’s the head of it – he’s not talking about the wine or the bread, or his own physical body
- Have you heard it before? “You can’t take communion if... you’re not baptized... you’ve got sin in your life... you’re not a member of our church... you don’t believe the same thing about this as we do...”
- What Paul IS saying is that you’re better off not taking it if it’s just an excuse to give the shaft to someone else in your church gathering – if you’re more concerned with being seen than with remembering – if you’re more wanting to make sure that YOU’RE remembered, rather than Jesus
- After all, it’s not MY table or YOUR table – it’s the Lord’s Table – it’s his feast
- But if you’re on a journey – if you’re seeking Him – if you’re looking to have your eyes opened – then what better place could you be right now? And what better thing could you be doing, then participating in an acted-out remembering of Jesus’ greatest, history-changing act?

**But if we examine ourselves, we will not be examined by God and judged in this way. But when we are judged and disciplined by the Lord, we will not be condemned with the world. So, dear brothers and sisters, when you gather for the Lord’s Supper, wait for each other. If you are really hungry, eat at home so you won’t bring judgement upon yourselves when you meet together.**

- The beauty of the Supper, when it’s right, is that there is equality around the table – no slave or free, no male or female, no rich or poor – all are one in Jesus and His love and acceptance
- That kind of love and acceptance should lead to contentment, not envy, unity, not factions, equality, not rivalry

### **“Missing the point”**

- The Supper has become a merit badge in some circles, a dividing point, a stressful, fearful and exclusionary factor, a dividing point between those “in” and “out”, the “weak” and the “strong”, the “good” and the “messed up”
- This is ironic, because it was never meant to be that, and that’s not the Jesus that we read about in His biographies – not His method, not his attitude or viewpoint – He’s the one who is continually saying “Don’t turn them away – let them come to me – come if you want to – I’m calling you” – He gives invitations, He doesn’t issue restraining orders – so why are we, ostensibly in His Name?
- But what is the desire to know who is “in” and who is “out”, other than envy?
- That’s not our job, and it’s never been – it’s God’s job – Jesus told story after story to try to illustrate that to people of his day
- But if we make ourselves the guardians of that, then that gives us power, and position – and our gain is their loss – envy
- I think about our society in Canada, and what we call “tall-poppy syndrome” of Canadians – no-one is allowed to get ahead without being cut-down – if you get too big, you’ll get what’s coming to you, a la Conrad Black
- And that’s so envy – how do we fight that? Not just in the Supper, not just inside the walls of a church – how do we fight that day in and day out? After all, envy wrecks everything

## **Fighting envy:**

- 1) **Take inventory of your “soft spots”** – what’s important enough to you that you feel it’s part of your identity? What gift or ability or mark of status matters enough that it can feel insecure around someone who has more/better of that thing?
- 2) **Change the price tags** – change perspective – what’s REALLY important?

“This is one of the main Christian ways of dealing with envy: to begin to question the system of values that says we should envy the wealthy, famous and beautiful. If God’s ways are different than ours, if he looks on the heart and not the outward appearance, if he works out his will through his own experience of death on the cross of Jesus, then maybe wealth, fame and good looks are not all they are cracked up to be, and wasting our time envying people who happen to have them is simply foolish. The ability to love, to build friendships and to be content, for example, is far more valuable than these. They are the qualities to strive for, the ones that satisfy more deeply than money, sex and fame. To begin to grasp this reversal of values is to begin to loosen the grip of envy on our souls.” (Tomlin, Seven Deadly Sins, 74)

- 3) **Realize everything good comes from God** – see through that person to the gift of God behind them
- 4) **Be rooted deeper in God** – know how great His love is for you

## **Take-Away Thought:**

**Envy disconnects and destroys, but Jesus offers the antidote: a connection with God that brings health, life and joy. “Envy wrecks everything”**

Therefore, rid yourselves of all malice and all deceit, hypocrisy, envy, and slander of every kind. Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good. (1 Peter 2:1-3)

## **Conclusion: Celebrating the Lord’s Supper**

- We want to be sensitive to a variety of backgrounds this morning – when we celebrate this in a few moments, I’ll give some simple instructions so that we’re all on the same page, and not falling into any of the same problems the church in the city of Corinth was
- We have wine here this morning for us to use – we also have grape juice, in case you have a history of some kind with or without alcohol
- Sarah is going to come and sing a song about Jesus – you’ll have a chance to prepare yourself and then to come up to the table on the side, where you’ll be served a piece of the one loaf of bread and a cup
- If you can then take that back to your seat, once everyone has had a chance to get them, then I’m going to recite what Jesus said, and we can eat and drink together, at the same time
- But please, before we go any further – while I believe that if you are journeying towards God that this is SO for you, if your conscience is screaming at you for one reason or another, you are in a supporting place here today – you are under no obligation to partake – you can just remain in your seat, and no-one will judge you - because otherwise, we really have missed the point, all of us

**Sarah to come and sing, play “In Christ Alone”**

- (partake together) – desire is that the Lord will open our eyes to Him

**Response: Clinging to the Cross (band)**

**Conclusion/prayer/next week is Easter**