

A Minister's Obstacles

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Chapter 4 -

THE BANE OF JEALOUSY

"If thine eye be evil, thy whole body shall be full of darkness."

In the Arena Chapel in Padua, the pioneer of fresco painting, GIOTTO, has given allegorical representations of the Deadly Vices and their opposite Virtues, facing each other in pairs on opposite walls. Envy is a female figure (Charity is likewise) who has long, wide ears to catch every breath of rumour that may hurt a neighbour's reputation; out of her mouth issues a serpent tongue, swift to poison all things sweet and tender; this serpent coils back on itself and stings the eyes of the envious one to blindness, and the figure stands in flames, representing the fierce fire that consumes the heart that takes pleasure in other's injuries and is made bitter by their prosperity.

"What is that to thee? Follow thou me."

IN THIS SPIRITUAL clinic for the man set apart, we refer to Numbers 12, wherein is deposited a story of tragedy and heartache. From this and other extracts from the Bible is mediated to us a mirror in which we see ourselves. The question of the nature of sin, in its evil principle, is of interest not only to the theologian and philosopher, but to all who would understand human life. This particular malady is set forth in relation to the priestly and prophetic offices of Old Testament days.

The sins of the flesh are often gross and repulsive, and merit condemnation, but the sins of the spirit deserve the same judgment. Sin is lawlessness in any form, and GOD's displeasure is indicated in this story by the resultant nemesis of leprosy. Miriam, sister to Moses, occupied an important position in Israel. Yet, throughout that journey of the ancient people, she was not content with GOD's permissive will. Her circumstances of life narrowed her view of the divine plan, and in a distorted vision she betrays a lack of confidence in GOD and her brother. A secret dissatisfaction possesses her as she compares her place with the places of Moses and another. In discontent against GOD and envy of another's position, she was smitten with jealous regard for selfish ends and excused herself under the guise of religion.

Tracing the whole story, verse 1 indicates why Miriam spoke against Moses. Fault-finding, evil speaking, and a censorious judgment found expression. She considered that she had been badly treated and felt slighted because of the place she had occupied in the nation's life. Before his marriage, Moses had Miriam alongside as companion and counsellor. She was the first woman in Israel and was conspicuous as leading the women of the nation in singing as they crossed the

Red Sea. But now another woman is in the confidence of Moses, and Miriam is suspicious, fearing displacement altogether. She eyes her sister-in-law as a rival, seeing the mote in another's eye but missing the beam in her own. Her murmuring is an expression of selfish thought for herself. She loses a single eye in service to hinder any further co-operation with those whose lives are linked with hers. Thus the critic is born with a sneer of bitterness. No healthy constructive criticism this, but sinful jealousy. It blights life and work. She saw nothing good in that marriage, and natural affection was quenched. It is true that one cannot sneer and pray or bless at the same time.

The hiss of the serpent is heard once more in Miriam's "**Hath the LORD indeed spoken only by Moses?"**" Here is doubt and denial of GOD's authority and questioning of His choice of a servant. Moses was GOD's appointed man, but his sister would despise him. Was he slow of speech? (Exodus 4:10). Was not she a prophetess? (Exodus 15:20). Were not Aaron and she equally as important as Moses? This family quarrel disrupted the harmony of service for GOD. Moses was a man of meekness, but his sister was jealous, revealing lack of control and a spirit not submissive to the divine choice and will. "**Jealousy burn like fire**" (Psalm 79:5). "**Jealousy is the rage of a man!**" (Proverbs 6:34). "**Jealousy is cruel as the grave**" (Song of Songs 8:6).

This embittering flame consumes character and destroys the bloom of beauty. GOD's judgment under Miriam was leprosy. "**We have done foolishly... we have sinned**" is the language of Miriam afterwards. No wonder she was ashamed and thought herself as good as dead (verse 11-14). If GOD be sovereign, why envy another's place and be jealous? Israel did not progress for one week until Miriam was restored. Her jealousy and leprous judgment hindered a whole nation! Jealousy is usually focussed here - in the same circle, not above it. How terrible is the condemnation of GOD upon any servant found guilty of this sin.

Nowhere is a man more tempted than just here. The minister moves in a circle of special influence and fellowship, and cannot be free from appraising values in one life and another. Now, the Bible uses the word "jealousy" in two senses. There is that which is good and that which is bad. Good jealousy is in the word, "**For I the Lord thy GOD am a jealous GOD**" (Exodus 20:5), or Paul's, "**Would to GOD you could bear with me a little . . . for I am jealous over you with Godly jealousy**" (II Corinthians 11:1-2). The commendable sort is the zeal of love. Not self-love, but love for others. It is devotion at white heat.

But the jealousy which besets GOD's servants, as in the case of Miriam, is that which is poisonous and foul, born of self-love. When someone else in Christian service receives more approbation and attention than we attract, there may be the stirrings of this evil spirit. When others congratulate the favoured one we are coldly silent, and if anyone should stumble and fall, we are secretly glad. How dangerous is this lust to the preacher. It is not that we should compare ourselves with a Spurgeon or a Moody or any other great one, but rather with someone on our own level and in our class. The minister of the Gospel will readily acknowledge the uniqueness and qualities of those outstanding men of GOD, and no jealous discontent is aroused. But when we measure someone's attainment slightly above our own, then we are prone to fall into the pernicious snare. Jealousy feeds on fine distinctions and the evident success or blessing enjoyed by another is to us gall and bitterness. Our own place and opportunity of service is not bringing to us satisfaction and we are like the Haman of Esther's day as he thought of one Mordecai - "**All this availeth me nothing, so long as . . .**" Yes! so long as another is prospering and we are not

sharing the same reward, we are easily soured. By the tone of the voice in deprecating the other, by our sneer and question about the quality of the work done or the depth of the character or the reserve for the task - by these innuendoes we reveal our prejudices in judgment and the taint is there.

I have read of a fable, wherein the devil once was crossing the Libyan Desert, when he met a group of small fiends who were tempting a holy hermit. They tried him with the seductions of the flesh: they sought to sour his mind with doubts and fears, they told him that all his austerities were nothing worth. But it was of no avail, the holy man was impeccable. Then the devil stepped forward. Addressing the imps, he said, "Your methods are too crude. Permit me for one moment. This is what I should recommend." Going up to the hermit he said, "Have you heard the news? Your brother has been made Bishop of Alexandria." The fable says that a scowl of malignant jealousy clouded the serene face of the holy man. This is not uncommon in the ministry.

Self-seeking, wire-pulling, official-tugging, inculcate this spirit of impish cruelty. Thus a useful life is blasted. We must be done with comparisons with our fellows: we are in the same fellowship and in the same service. We need to focus our eyes upon JESUS our Lord. "The Master praises, what are men?"

Does not our Lord speak of "**an evil eye**" (Mark 7:22) perverting the moral nature of man so that it looks with disfavour or bitterness upon another's good fortune or honour? "**Saul eyed David from that day and forward**" - when all the dancing maidens chanted, "**Saul hath slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands**" (I Samuel 18:7). The chief sphere of this vice is among rivals for popular favour. A doctor or lawyer or minister does not look with jealous mein upon the success of a business man or teacher or politician. But that colleague in the same circle who is blessed may be the object of this baneful scrutiny.

The heightening of interest and usefulness in another may mean - in our eyes - detraction from our own reputation. Rivalry in schools and in sport is permissible, but among families or groups of spiritually related lives it is mischievous! The jealousy between Judah and Israel was the more bitter because they were of the same racial blood. We are not monopolists in this realm, but we corner much of the market by our regrettable investments in this way.

It is related of the late Dr. F. B. Meyer that when he first went to the Northfield Conference, he attracted great crowds. People thronged to hear his special addresses. But, later, Dr. G. Campbell Morgan came to Northfield, and the people were lured by the brilliant Bible studies to desert Meyer. Meyer confessed a liability to jealousy as he ministered to a smaller group. "The only way I can conquer my feeling," he said, "is to pray for him daily, which I do." Magnanimity is the grace which can bloom if nurtured like that; in this way a Christian man triumphs.

Shakespeare has called attention to the soul-destroying force of this unclean spirit, particularly in his Othello, where it is the dominating passion. Othello, true poet and romantic lover, grows coarse, hurls insufferable taunts at "gentle" Desdemona, calls her filthy names, strikes her, and in the end murders her. Thus happiness is wrecked, beautiful and noble lives are ruined, and evil triumphs. Jealousy distorts the nature and lets loose the hell within.

"The mind is its own place, and of itself
Can make a Heaven of hell, a hell of Heaven."

- Is it because we have a feeling of inferiority that jealousy of another is possible?
- Is it a consciousness that we have not received our due reward?
- Is it that we are more concerned about the approval of a congregation, which might easily prefer some other voice, than we are for the Master's acknowledgment of faithfulness?
- Is it that we do not care what reflects upon the service of GOD that we are not consumed with a jealous regard for His glory?

There is a salutary warning which counsels us against yielding to this inward deterioration. Close akin to envy, jealousy will leave a man with heavy heart, pale and palsied, with lean soul and louring visage.

A minister in the mesh of this evil desire becomes bad-tempered, nursing worldly delusions, finding no good in others, never rejoicing with his brethren. This is a sin against all virtue and all goodness and a sin against the HOLY SPIRIT. Such livid transformation of character is a tragedy in a servant of GOD.

This love of self brings unhappiness to life, and Sir James M. Barrie was surely right when he declared in his characteristic way that he often felt that it was not love of money that was the root of all evil, but rather jealousy. Evidently he had witnessed the evil effects of it in many instances in which men, brooding over their fancied wrongs, had turned sour, and had lost their peace of mind. This bane is a possible corollary of ambition, distinction, and a desire for fame. The man who is free from the curse is the one with the healthy mind and heart.

Brethren, we need to guard well our ambitions, lest they be selfish. When a man identifies himself with such a cause as CHRIST's, when he devotes his life to it, he is apt to expect a reward. That may be natural in the affairs of the world, but let us look not for earthly recognition as a paramount motive of service, or else we shall be consumed by jealous regard in estimating one another. Love for CHRIST should be the motive, and where love is, self passes out of sight. Envy not the place or the possessions or the success of others, lest we are ensnared.

The late Dr. Dinsdale T. Young said that jealousy was the dominating temptation of the ministry. Alas! that it should have to be said. It is irrational as it is irreligious. Why should ministers be cast in the same mould? And why should not we rejoice in another's gifts?

Remember, GOD in CHRIST gives His gifts to His redeemed Church in the sovereignty of His holy will (Romans 12, I Corinthians 12). Thank GOD for all who so notably surmount this evil bane! Thank GOD for the generous souls who never miss an opportunity to encourage and honour a brother minister! They are like roses beautifying a wilderness.

Richard Baxter, The Reformed Pastor, calls our attention to the blight of jealousy when he says:

"Will any workman malign another because he helpeth him to do his Master's work? Yet, alas! how common is this heinous sin among men of parts and eminence in the Church! They can secretly blot the reputation of those that stand cross to their own; and what they cannot for shame do in plain and open terms they will do in malicious intimations, so that it is their

ordinary practice to keep down the estimation of any they dislike . . . And some go so far, that they are unwilling that anyone who is abler than themselves should come into their pulpits, lest he should be applauded above themselves. A fearful thing, that any man that hath the least of the fear of GOD, should so envy GOD's gifts, and hath rather that his hearers were unconverted and the drowsy not awakened, than it should be done by another who may be preferred."

Are not these words true in this modern age? Is not this one of the sins of the ministry? Some characters have been besmirched, and lives of usefulness have been bruised and broken, because of the spiteful gossip and the evil innuendoes of "brethren" prating dark things against the conscientious, the devoted, and those who have sought to keep their souls clean by high ethical ideals in CHRIST.

Well has the Apostle Paul included this baneful spirit in his list of evil things which beset the Christian life. "**Envying... strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults . . .**" (II Corinthians 12:20).

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