

WISDOM UNIVERSITY

PROVERBS 14:30

HEALTH CLASS



FIRST BYRON CHRISTIAN REFORMED CHURCH

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INTRODUCTION

Envy has never been a greater problem than today. There are two main drivers. The first is social media. Ethan Kross, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan who studies the impact of Facebook on our wellbeing, says that through social media, "envy is being taken to an extreme." Robert Greene explains how in *The Laws of Human Nature*:

"Through social media we have a continual window into the lives of friends, pseudo-friends, and celebrities. And what we see is not some unvarnished peek into their world but a highly idealized image that they present. We see only the most exciting images from their vacations, the happy faces of their friends, and children, accounts of their continual self-improvement, the fascinating people they are meeting, the great causes and projects they are involved in, the example of success in their endeavors."

Or, as *The Guardian* put it more succinctly: **The age of envy: How to be happy when everyone else's life looks perfect.** Our phones are envy amplification machines.

A second driver of envy is the politics of inequality which thrives on fanning the flames of jealousy by highlighting wealth, privilege, and power differences in society.

None of us are immune to these social pressures which multiply the envy we find in our own hearts. But, so what? I can hide my envy so that no one sees it or is hurt by it. If unopposed, envy usually does end up hurting other people through criticism, gossip, and other underhand attacks. However, even if we do manage to stop it hurting others, it hurts ourselves, as Proverbs 14:30 warns us: **A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh, but envy makes the bones rot.** Or, to put it another way, **Envy eats us, but peace feeds us.**

CONTEXT

Wisdom University is not so much about IQ or EQ, but SQ. The focus is not limited to our minds and our feelings, but is much wider than that. Yes, it will grow our IQ (mental intelligence), and our EQ (emotional intelligence), but it will increase our SQ (spiritual intelligence) even more. It includes the mind and the emotions but it's bigger than both. It takes in the whole inner life of a person, and therefore is much more holistic than IQ and EQ. Indeed, it frequently shows the link between spiritual wholeness and physical wholeness (e.g. Prov. 15:13, 30; 17:22; 18:14). Proverbs 14:30 is one of those holistic verses that connect what's going on in our spirits with what's going on in our bodies.



So how does envy affect our bodies?



1. ENVY EATS US

Envy makes the bones rot (Proverbs 14:30).

One night about five years ago, just before bed, I saw a tweet from a friend announcing how delighted he was to have been shortlisted for a journalism award. I felt my stomach lurch and my head spin, my teeth clench and my chest tighten. I did not sleep until the morning. Moya Sanner, *The Guardian*.

Usually envy is not so obviously harmful as this, but mini-versions of this inner monster munch on our bodies every time we envy someone. There are so many stimulants which waken this monster: career envy, house envy, kitchen envy, garden envy, children envy, food envy, muscle envy, holiday envy, husband envy, wife envy, child envy, car envy, boat envy, pulpit envy, gifts envy, popularity envy, fish envy, deer envy, followers envy, likes envy, beauty envy, and so on.

Envy is sadness at another's good, a desire to see them lose good and for you to gain it. Although it's often invisible, it always injures us. Secular research has connected envy to bitterness, anger, depression, anxiety, and insomnia. More recently, it has also been associated with physical health problems such as infections, cardio-vascular disease, and cancer. We are, quite literally, consumed by our envy, as Proverbs 14:30 told us 3000 years before science did. We see a particularly vivid example of this in Jezebel who killed poor Naboth to get his vineyard, and was later eaten by dogs (1 Kings 21; 2 Kings 9).

There's a chemical process at work here. Envy triggers our fight-or-flight mode. This floods our bodies with adrenaline and cortisol, spiking blood pressure and heart rate. While these chemicals are harmless in short and small doses, they are extremely corrosive over the long-term. Our bodies were not meant to be swimming in these acids. No wonder that envy is known as one of the seven *deadly* sins: wrath, greed, sloth, pride, lust, envy, and gluttony

CHANGING OUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Stop waking the monster. What kind of envy do you suffer from most, and what stimulates it? What media or social media or shops or situations stir the monster and start him munching on your insides? How can you avoid waking this monster.

Confess your envy. In addition to the outward measures, that will avoid waking the monster, use confession of this sin to weaken the monster. Confession drains the monster of power and energy. It blunts his teeth and even extracts them.

STARVE ENVY OR
BE EATEN BY ENVY



What's the medicine for this malady?
How do I kill this monster?



2. PEACE FEEDS US

A tranquil heart gives life to the flesh (Proverbs 14:30).

If envy eats us, peace feeds us. If envy drains us, peace fills us. The specific peace referred to here is the peace of contentment. Contentment is the opposite of covetousness and has the opposite effect. While covetousness is a monster, contentment is a medicine. So, how do we get this medicine? We need four shots.

Humility: When John the Baptists' disciples were engaging in comparisonitis, John medicated it with humility (John 3:26-30). John was grateful for any role he was given in the kingdom and was happy to decrease if it meant Christ increasing.

Spirituality: Moses was tempted with comparisonitis when he had the choice between the pleasures of Egypt or pains for Christ? Faith enabled him to choose pains for Christ because he was looking more at the invisible God and spiritual blessing than visible riches and fleshly pleasures (Heb. 11:24-27).

Unity: When the Corinthians were suffering with comparisonitis, Paul medicated it with the unity of Christ's body. Christ as the head has everything, and as we are all Christ's body, therefore all things are ours (1 Cor. 3:21-23). We may not possess everything yet, but we have title to it. Our names are on everything, and one day all things will be in our hands (Matt. 5:5).

Eternity: When Lot engaged in comparisonitis, and chose the best land (Gen. 13:11), Abraham did not compete, but kept his eye on his eternal home and land above (Heb. 11:10).

CHANGING OUR STORY WITH GOD'S STORY

Imagine how healthy we would be if we could stop envying! How many years of our lives we may have lost through the damage of envy. How many years could be added and how much happier and healthier these years would be if we could cure envy. Take the four vaccines to fill you with life-giving peace, and take booster-shots to maintain it.

Christ did this perfectly. In his human nature, he had the perfect ingredients of humility, spirituality, unity, and eternity, and therefore had perfect contentment. Not once did even a hint of envy enter his mind. By faith we take this part of his perfect contentment as ours and we give our sinful covetousness to him.

COMPARISONITIS TAKES LIFE
BUT CONTENTMENT GIVES IT.



CONCLUSION



PRAYER: God of peace, forgive me for how much I've allowed envy to eat away at my life. Help me to increase contentment and life. Amen.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. In what ways is this the age of envy?
2. Who do you envy and why?
3. In what ways has envy helped you or harmed you?
4. How can you avoid the monster of envy?
5. What will you do to take the four shots?
6. How does this sermon increase your faith in Christ, your faith in Christ, and your likeness to Christ?

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