



18. Envy

Delivered by His Eminence
ash-Shaykh Su'ood ibn Ibraaheem ash-Shuraym
8 Jumaada al-Oolaa 1441h (3 January 2020)

All praise is due to Allaah, the Most Kind, the One who bestows abundantly. He alone sent His scripture down to us, causes the clouds to move, and defeats those who come together against Him. He grants guidance to His servants who fulfil His commands and avoid His prohibitions, and He makes daunting challenges easy for them to face. In contrast, He has threatened those who reject Him with deprivation and punishment. None deserves worship besides Him, and all people are to repent to Him. I bear witness that none has the right to be worshipped except Allaah alone, without any partner, and I bear witness that Muhammad is Allaah's worshipping servant and Messenger. He was the best individual who worshipped Allaah; repented to Him; and called people to guidance, mercy, and all that is correct. Allaah defended him against opponents, and rendered their schemes futile. May Allaah grant an abundance of commendation and protection to His Messenger, as well as to the Messenger's household, wives, Companions, and all who continue to follow their path until the day on which we all return to Allaah.

I counsel all of you – as well as my own self which has numerous shortcomings – to observe taqwaa of Allaah (i.e. fulfil His commands and avoid His prohibitions), and to steadfastly adhere to the Book of Allaah and the Sunnah of His Messenger (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection). Taqwaa is a lifejacket that saves a person from drowning in the seas of misguidance. "Indeed, the truly obedient worshipping servants of Allaah will not have reason to feel any fear or sorrow. They are people who had eemaan and continually observed taqwaa."¹

Servants of Allaah, all sound-minded individuals would agree that just as there are certain diseases that affect a person's body, there are also diseases that affect a person's conduct. They would also agree that some diseases which affect conduct can cause more damage than those which affect the body. No disease affecting a person's conduct damages his heart, detracts from his rank, and incites him against others as severely as the disease of envy.

Envy is a serious ailment. It weakens a person's eemaan and causes him to lead a life of misery because he remains upset about the blessings that others have been granted by Allaah. A person like that wastes his time by extending his eyes towards the appealing things of this world that Allaah has granted people. That person exhausts his sight by constantly looking at what people have, and he occupies his heart with the desire for others to be deprived of their blessings. When someone's heart and sight are occupied with anything other than obeying Allaah, that person will only tire himself out and, at the same time, not end up getting anywhere. I swear by Allaah that such a description is manifest deprivation.

Servants of Allaah, one of the most comprehensive definitions for envy that scholars have mentioned is that it refers to an internal feeling which emanates from liking something that someone else has, but wanting them to be deprived of it because of the jealousy one feels due to them having it for themselves, or due to them sharing it with oneself.

In most cases, an individual can feel this envy towards those who are near to him or around him, since envy leads a person to always have others below himself and never have any of them outdo him. Anyone who harbours this blameworthy trait of envy had one precedent set for them before the Earth was populated, and another one after it was populated. The earlier precedent was set by ibles, whom

¹ Soorah Yoonus (10):62-63.



Allaah expelled from His mercy. Envy was the only thing that prevented Iblees from bowing, and the only thing that led to Adam and Hawwaa' being removed from Jannah. The latter precedent was set by one of two sons that Adam had. "Each of them offered a sacrifice to Allaah as a means of seeking nearness to Him, but it was accepted from one of them while it was not accepted from the other. He said to his brother, 'I will most certainly kill you.' His brother replied, 'Indeed, Allaah only accepts from the people of taqwaa'."² Thus, envy led to the first instance of Allaah being disobeyed in the heavens and the first instance of Him being disobeyed upon the Earth.

Human beings, by their very nature, are not immune to feeling the aforementioned envy towards others. However, those who are content with Allaah's decrees suppress any sort of envious inclination, and they seek Allaah's assistance in ridding themselves of it; while those who are discontent actively harbour envy to the point that they hope for others to be harmed. There are some who rarely feel that way while others feel that way quite often. Allaah's Messenger (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection) indeed spoke the truth when he said, "The diseases of prior peoples have come to you discreetly, those being envy and hatred." This was collected by at-Tirmitheeh.³ This is why Allaah prohibited us from harbouring that envy towards others. He said,

﴿وَلَا تَتَمَنَّوْا مَا فَضَّلَ اللَّهُ بِهِ بَعْضَكُمْ عَلَى بَعْضٍ﴾

"Do not wish for what Allaah has specifically favoured some of you with over others."⁴ Some of the Salaf explained this as referring to envy; in other words: one wishing for others to be stripped of their blessings so that he himself can have them. This feeling represents opposition to Allaah's will, wisdom, and justice. Allaah, who is perfect in every way, stated in that regard,

﴿أَمْ يَحْسُدُونَ النَّاسَ عَلَى مَا آتَاهُمُ اللَّهُ مِنْ فَضْلِهِ﴾

"Do people maliciously envy the Prophet Muhammad and his followers because of the bounty Allaah granted them, and spitefully wish for them to be stripped of those blessings?"⁵

Servants of Allaah, envy occurs when an individual feels angry towards others for no reason besides them having been granted certain blessings by Allaah: the One whose blessings are innumerable. A discerning individual should realize that there is a resemblance between envy and fire: envy devours a person's own righteous deeds just as fire devours wood. Servants of Allaah, this is nothing unusual. Envy is what made Iblees become too arrogant to obey Allaah's command, made a brother kill his own sibling, and made a group of brothers throw their own sibling down a well. It is also what obstructed Aboo Jahl from accepting the Prophet Muhammad (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection), as scholars of tafseer mention in a narration from al-Akhnas ibn Shareeq. It states that he went to the home of Aboo Jahl and asked him, "Abul-Hakam, what do you think about what you have heard from Muhammad?" He replied, "What have I heard? There used to be competition in nobility between us and the descendants of 'Abd Manaaf⁶. They fed people and so did we. They courageously fought off opponents and so did we. They gave to others and so did we. That continued until we were neck-and-neck like two horses in a race. Then, they said, 'Among us is a Prophet to whom revelation descends from the heavens.' How can we ever catch up to them after that? I swear by Allaah that we will

² Soorah al-Maa'idah (5):27.

³ Jaami' at-Tirmitheeh (2510). Graded hasan by al-Albaanee.

⁴ Soorah an-Nisaa' (4):32.

⁵ Soorah an-Nisaa' (4):54.

⁶ The fourth forefather of the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection).



never believe in him or accept his message.” Al-Akhnas then stood and left.⁷

Servants of Allaah, you should also contemplate the contents of Soorah Yoosuf. It is a remarkable chapter of the Qur’aan that captivates the hearts of all who reflect upon its meanings and take heed of the best of narratives. It mentions the hatching of plots, as well as the separation of son from father. It evokes very deep emotions and makes one feel great sympathy for the victim of the envy which caused so much harm. If we contemplated the Soorah as it deserves, we would realize that envy renders a person who harbours it blind and deaf. We would note that an envious person is not only spiteful about what happens to others in their state of wakefulness; rather, he is even spiteful towards them if they see something pleasing in their dreams while asleep. Such a person’s envy has no bounds. How could it be otherwise in light of the fact that the Prophet Ya’qoob had told his son, Yoosuf,

﴿يَبْنَؤُ لَا تَقْصُصْ رُءْيَاكَ عَلَىٰ إِخْوَتِكَ فَيَكِيدُوا لَكَ كَيْدًا﴾

“My dear young son, do not inform your brothers about your dream lest they scheme against you.”⁸ It is certainly astonishing to realize that an envious individual is not only spiteful towards others because of mundane motives. In fact, he may even be spiteful towards scholars or righteous individuals because of their reputations, not because of their knowledge or righteous deeds. All such a person gleams from his envy is an arrogant heart, hateful eye, and vicious tongue. He enters the battlegrounds of envy not realizing that he is the one who will lose, and the reason for his loss is because – in reality – his opposition is towards Allaah who bestows His blessings upon whomever He wills.

If we contemplate the aforementioned Soorah as it deserves, we would realize that the envy in a person’s heart blinds him to the reprehensibility of the sins he commits in order to achieve his aims, even if that involves wronging the nearest of people to him. Envy makes him think his wrongdoing is actually praiseworthy and free of all blame. When Yoosuf’s brothers spitefully envied him, they intended to murder or banish him in order to attain their father’s undivided love and attention. Furthermore, they felt that attaining their goal was what would make them righteous individuals in the end. They had said to each other, “You have to kill Yoosuf or banish him to some far-off desolate place. By doing so, you will attain your father’s undivided love and attention. Then, after that, you can repent to Allaah and be righteous people.”⁹

If we contemplate that Soorah as it deserves, we would note that an envious person refrains from giving those whom he envies the true description that befits them. We find that Yoosuf’s brothers referred to him with his name, and did not describe him as a brother of theirs. They said, “Kill Yoosuf or banish him”¹⁰, they said, “Yoosuf and his full brother are truly dearer to our father than us”¹¹, and they said, “Our dear father, why do you not trust us with Yoosuf?”¹² In contrast, when referring to their other brother whom they did not envy, they did not refrain from describing him as their brother. For instance, they said, “Our dear father, we will not receive any further measure of grain unless we take our brother. Thus, allow our brother to come with us so that we can receive another measure.”¹³

The aforementioned envy can kill without any weapon, burn without any fuel, and drown without any water. I beseech Allaah to protect all of us from its ills. In the name of Allaah, the Most Merciful, the Bestower of mercy. “Say: I seek refuge with Allaah, the Lord of daybreak. I seek His

⁷ Cited by ibn Katheer in Tafseer al-Qur’aan al-‘Atheem (3/251). See also Seerah ibn Ishaq (pg. 189-190), Dalaa’il an-Nubuwwah (2/206). Its chain of narration is broken.

⁸ Soorah Yoosuf (12):7.

⁹ Soorah Yoosuf (12):9.

¹⁰ Soorah Yoosuf (12):9.

¹¹ Soorah Yoosuf (12):8.

¹² Soorah Yoosuf (12):11.

¹³ Soorah Yoosuf (12):63.



protection from the harms of all things He has created, I seek His protection from the harms of the night as it comes with its darkness, I seek His protection from the harms of those who practice witchcraft when they blow into the knots they tie as they cast their spells, and I seek His protection from the harms of every envious person who hates others due to the blessings Allaah has bestowed upon them and, as a result, seeks to hurt them, wishes bad for them, or hopes that they be deprived of those blessings.”¹⁴



Allaah deserves praise that is abundant, sincere, and filled with goodness. That is what our Lord loves and is pleased with. I implore Allaah to grant commendation and protection to His worshipping servant and Messenger.

Servants of Allaah, you must observe taqwa and you must realize that happiness and envy cannot ever coexist in a person’s heart. This is because happiness comes from being pleased with Allaah, whereas envy stands in opposition to being pleased with Allaah. In fact, envy itself harms the envious person himself just as much as he wants harm for the one whom he envies. This point is sufficiently clear when we keep in mind that an envious person feels upset when others experience happiness.

Servants of Allaah, a person who is envied should prepare himself for the blows aimed at him by those who are envious. The enlightened mind he has will make certain people spiteful towards him while the enlightened heart he has will earn him supporters.

Servants of Allaah, an envious person brings five punishments upon himself before his envy reaches its target: he incurs Allaah’s wrath, he covers his heart with distress, he puts himself through adversity that he will not be rewarded for facing, he does something that makes him blameworthy, and the gates of happiness will be closed in his face.

However, although the foregoing blameworthy envy deprives one of life, we must take note of the fact that there is a praiseworthy form of envy that actually gives one life. High aspirations do not lead to blameworthy envy. Rather, they produce a praiseworthy manifestation of envy which takes the form of liking the good others have and wanting the same or better for oneself, but without wanting others to be deprived of what they have been granted by Allaah. A person with this perspective desires to rise to the lofty level of those whose blessings he envies, not bring them down to the low level where he remains. This is what marks the distinction between blameworthy and praiseworthy forms of envy, and the only people who are successful in doing what is right in that regard are those who have hearts that do not contain spite or malice towards others. That is Allaah’s bounty which He grants to whomever He wills, and Allaah is the owner of limitless bounty. Bearing that in mind enables us to understand the statement of the Prophet (may Allaah grant him commendation and protection), “There is to be no envy except in two cases. One is the case of someone whom Allaah grants wealth and he then uses it all to do what is correct, and the other is the case of someone whom Allaah grants wisdom and he then judges according to it and imparts it to others.” This was collected by al-Bukhaaree and Muslim.¹⁵

¹⁴ Soorah al-Falaq (113):1-5.

¹⁵ Saheeh al-Bukhaaree (1409), Saheeh Muslim (816).