

JEALOUSY AND ENVY PUNISHED

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"Love envieth not; love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly." – 1 Corinthians 13:4,5.

ST. PAUL includes envy, and therefore jealousy, in his enumerations of the works of the flesh and the Devil – together with anger, malice, hatred and strife. These are works of the Devil in that they are characteristics of Satan. According to the Bible account, Satan's ambition led him to envy the Almighty and ultimately to attempt to establish in the earth, with man as his subject, a rival empire to the Heavenly domain of Jehovah. His ambition and jealousy led to strife or opposition – led to a misrepresentation of the Divine character in order to deceive our first parents.

The evil traits mentioned are works of the flesh in the sense that after our race, poisoned by Satan, had come under Divine sentence, the dying process, which Satan encouraged, included evil works, evil desires of every kind. More and more our race has become subject to these adverse influences, as it has become weak, dying, unbalanced.

St. Paul urges all of the Lord's people to put off these Satanic characteristics and to adopt instead the Divine characteristics – those which have the Divine approval, and which work in us and make us more and more Godlike. These are described as meekness, gentleness, peace, long-suffering, brotherly kindness, love. We are assured that those who will ultimately become God's saintly people on the highest plane of Heavenly glory will have these characteristics well developed, dominant. The Apostle indicates that such will be granted an abundant entrance into the "everlasting Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ." – 2 Peter 1:11.

That Kingdom will not represent all the saved of humanity, but will be the Divine agency for carrying salvation to all the families of the earth. Nevertheless, only this one offer of salvation is now open; and only by following the prescribed course and cultivating these various qualities will any now be fit for, or be received into the everlasting Kingdom. Thus all the members of that Kingdom, as St. Paul declares, must be copies of God's dear Son, our Redeemer – not copies in the flesh, but copies in our hearts and in our intentions. This will mean to be as nearly perfect in the flesh, as nearly in harmony with the Divine requirements, as possible.

Indeed, the Bible clearly teaches that all who will ever attain everlasting life and Divine favor, even on the earthly plane as perfect men in an earthly body, must entirely get rid of everything appertaining to the spirit of Satan and sin; that they must thus get back to the original image and likeness of God as exemplified in Adam before he sinned in the Garden. **[R5308 : page 269]**

MIRIAM'S JEALOUSY AND ENVY

The lesson of today's Bible Study tells us of a serious error made by Aaron and Miriam, the brother and the sister of Moses, both his seniors. We may safely conclude that while the two participated in the sin, Miriam's was the leading spirit. This view is fully justified by the outcome of the lesson, which shows that God's punishment rested upon her, and not upon Aaron.

The start of the matter was a question of family pride. Moses had married an Ethiopian, or Cushite, woman. We know not if this was his first wife, whom he had married in the land of Midian, and who only now joined him as the Israelites were about to start on their journey toward Canaan. Some have surmised that Moses' first wife had died, and that Zipporah was his second wife. No matter which, the fact remains that at this time she came to live with Moses in the Camp of Israel, and thus became, as wife of the great and influential leader, the first lady of the nation.

Previous to this, Miriam had undoubtedly filled the office of chief lady. It was but natural that she should feel the loss of her position and of the influence which went with it. She felt especially keenly upon the subject as she reflected that her new sister-in-law was of an alien race. This fact seemed to give Miriam's jealousy a religious footing; and she doubtless reasoned to herself, and convinced herself, that her hostility to her sister-in-law was not based upon jealousy, but upon a high moral ground, affecting the honor of God, the honor of His nation, Israel, and the future possibilities of Abraham's seed in the Land of Promise.

We are to remember that it was this same Miriam who, as the little maiden, watched Pharaoh's daughter when she went to the bathing place on the Nile where Moses was found in the little basket of bulrushes. This same Miriam hastened to bring to the premises her mother to be the nurse for the foundling, Moses. This same Miriam, doubtless, with Aaron had enjoyed special privileges in the confidence of Moses in respect to all the affairs of Israel under the Lord's leadings. This same Miriam had been recognized of the Lord as a prophetess. She it was who, with her timbrels, after the crossing of the Red Sea by the Israelites and after the sea had returned with destruction upon their Egyptian pursuers, led the Israelitish women in the song of triumph.

Thus seen, there was what we might call an excuse for Miriam's jealousy. Indeed, we cannot imagine any jealousy which could not find an excuse for its existence – good or bad. No good people can harbor jealousy, envy, etc., without in some manner deluding themselves into thinking that the peculiar circumstances of their case fully justify their attitude.

After thinking slightly of her brother as foolish in his course, Miriam became more and more convinced that God would not think of using especially in His service one who had thus lost caste with herself. Her poisoned mind began to see evidences that the Lord had

forsaken Moses, and that otherwise he would not have fallen into what she was sure was a great mistake. She communicated her fears to her brother Aaron, and the two doubtless thought seriously and prayed much respecting the sad fall of Israel's leader and the necessity thus laid upon them to make good his dereliction. [R5308 : page 270]

Aaron apparently must have been a weak character, and merely used and useful as the mouthpiece of Moses. He showed much weakness on this occasion, as he did during Moses' absence in the mountain, when in response to the persuasion of the Israelites he made for them the golden calf and assisted them in their idolatrous worship, which they desired. Miriam also probably assented at that time that such would be the only course to take to satisfy the rebellious spirit of the people.

The text implies that Miriam began to spread her seditious suggestions throughout the Camp of Israel, referring to her brother Aaron as holding similar sentiments: The people were to be prepared and the Lord was to be helped, of course, by the primary suggestion that Moses was not the only leader of the nation, that Miriam and Aaron were also prophets and in relationship with the Lord in exactly the same manner and degree as Moses. This insidious preparation of the people would make ready for the expected time when God would entirely disown Moses and speak entirely through Miriam, Aaron being her mouthpiece.

AND THE LORD HEARD IT

Too often do the Lord's people and others forget that the Lord is not inattentive to His own business, the interests of His own cause, but is working all things according to the counsel of His own will. As Bible students, we should more and more learn to appreciate this great fact and to remember that prosperity in the Lord's work cannot come by might or human power or cunning, but only by and in harmony with the Lord's Spirit, the Lord's Power, the Lord's Will.

The Lord nipped the conspiracy in the bud by suddenly calling Moses, Aaron and Miriam into His presence before the Tabernacle. All three obeyed the summons, Miriam doubtless supposing that now the moment had come when the Lord would show that she had rightly divined His intentions in ousting Moses from the leadership and appointing herself. The denouncement, however, was very different. God did, indeed, declare that Miriam and Aaron had to some extent occupied the place of prophets, in that God had been pleased so to use them; but with equal distinctness the Lord pointed out that His dealing with Moses was on a very much higher plane. To him God had spoken directly, not through dreams and visions, but in plain language. Thus the ambitions which were the grounds of the jealousy, envy and conspiracy and evil speaking, God promptly set aside.

Additionally, however, God gave a punishment. As the Divine Presence, represented by the pillar of cloud, departed from them, Moses and Aaron beheld that their sister Miriam had been smitten with leprosy. Aaron recognized that all this signified that he had assisted and upheld his sister in a sinful course. He recognized that his brother Moses was indeed the chief of God's people; and to him Aaron uttered this cry of distress and prayer for relief, saying, "O my lord, lay not, I pray thee, this sin upon us; for that we have done foolishly, and for that we have sinned. Let her not be as one dead!"

Then Moses cried unto the Lord, saying, "Heal her now, O God, I beseech Thee!" And God heard Moses and healed her then, but directed that she should be treated as every other person was treated whose leprosy was declared to be healed. All such were required to remain seven days outside the Camp, under inspection, to see that no further symptoms of the disease appeared, before they would be admitted to the Camp again.

"THE LAW WAS A SHADOW"

The Apostle explains to us that the various things commanded Israel under their Law Covenant were prophetic shadows illustrating higher things – things appertaining to Spiritual Israel. Thus, for instance, the disease of leprosy, practically incurable, except by Divine interposition, was a type of sin; and the seven days of excommunication from the favored people represented a full and complete period of tests as respects a putting away of sin, a cleansing, a return to harmony with God.

Various lessons might be drawn from today's Study. But the one in which all can probably best agree is that jealousy, envy, based upon selfishness, is amongst the most deceptive of all sins and one very serious in the sight of God, whatever may be thought of it by others.

The text supplied us is St. Paul's exhortation to the Church. And the Church, we must remember, is that special class called out from humanity in general by the Gospel Message to become followers of Jesus and joint-heirs with Him. Their call is to a sacrifice with Jesus of all earthly rights and claims, and to a full submission to the Divine will and arrangements in everything. Their covenant is to be fully submissive to the headship of the Savior and, like Him, to be loyal to every principle and arrangement of the Divine Program.

This leaves no room for any work of the flesh or the Devil. All these are to be put off, discarded, as displeasing to God. On the contrary, the fruits and graces of the Holy Spirit are to be substituted, that thus the followers of Jesus, like Himself, might ultimately attain to the fulness of Divine favor and glory, honor and immortality – at His right hand of Power.

While, therefore, all people should strive to throw off the works of darkness and to conform themselves to the Divine arrangements under the guidance of the Prince of Life, nevertheless, the Church,

especially consecrated to God, should remember that all their hopes of glory, honor and immortality are associated with the development of right characters and the opposition of the wrong. Let us also remember that "Love envieth not; Love vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, doth not behave itself unseemly." And Love, therefore, represents the full standard of the Golden Rule and the full character of God; for "God is Love." – I John 4:8.

The prompt punishment of Miriam and its effect remind us of the fact that such prompt dealing with sin will be the regular order under the Messianic Kingdom and will bring prompt results then. All men realize to some extent that whosoever sins will suffer; but the penalties, or sufferings, resulting from sin are often so far removed as not to be identified by the sufferer. Hence with many the lesson is lost.

Besides, our erroneous theology of the Dark Ages led many of us to misrepresent the punishment of sin as being eternal torture. Thus we directly contradicted God's arrangement, drew attention away from the present punishment and wages of sin, and made the future punishments so absurdly unreasonable that nobody believes them, or, believing them, are misled into the supposition that a dying prayer for forgiveness will permit an utter escape from their penalties. We cannot improve upon the Divine arrangement, "Whatsoever a man soweth that shall he also reap" – either in the present life or in that which is to come – but in no case a devilish and eternal torture.

"Upon Thy Word I rest,
So strong, so sweet, so sure;
So full of comfort blest,
So wonderful, so pure –

The Word that changeth not, that faileth never!

My King, I rest upon Thy Word forever!"

