Treatise 10. On Jealousy and Envy

Cyprian of Carthage (c. AD 200–258)

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Treatise 10. On Jealousy and Envy

Argument. -After Pointing Out that Jealousy or Envy is a Sin All the More Heinous in Proportion as Its Wickedness is Hidden, and that Its Origin is to Be Traced to the Devil, He Gives Illustrations of Envy from the Old Testament, and Gathers, by Reference to Special Vices, that Envy is the Root of All Wickedness. Therefore with Reason Was Fraternal Hatred Forbidden Not in One Place Only, But by Christ and His Apostles. Finally, Exhorting to the Love of One's Enemies by God's Example, He Dissuades from the Sin of Envy, by Urging the Rewards Set Before the Indulgence of Love.

1. To be jealous of what you see to be good, and to be envious of those who are better than yourself, seems, beloved brethren, in the eyes of some people to be a slight and petty wrong; and, being thought trifling and of small account, it is not feared; not being feared, it is contemned; being contemned, it is not easily shunned: and it thus becomes a dark and hidden mischief, which, as it is not perceived so as to be guarded against by the prudent, secretly distresses incautious minds. But, moreover, the Lord bade us be prudent, and charged us to watch with careful solicitude, lest the adversary, who is always on the watch and always lying in wait, should creep stealthily into our breast, and blow up a flame from the sparks, magnifying small things into the greatest; and so, while soothing the unguarded and careless with a milder air and a softer breeze, should stir up storms and whirlwinds, and bring about the destruction of faith and the shipwreck of salvation and of life. Therefore, beloved brethren, we must be on our guard, and strive with all our powers to repel, with solicitous and full watch-fulness, the enemy, raging and aiming his darts against every part of our body in which we can be stricken and wounded, in accordance with what the Apostle Peter, in his epistle, forewarns and teaches, saying, "Be sober, and watch; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, goeth about seeking any one to devour."

2. He goeth about every one of us; and even as an enemy besieging those who are shut up (in a city), he examines the walls, and tries whether there is any part of the walls less firm and less trustworthy, by entrance through which he may penetrate to the inside. He presents to the eyes seductive forms and easy pleasures, that he may destroy chastity by the sight. He tempts the ears with harmonious music, that by the hearing of sweet sounds he may relax and enervate Christian vigour. He provokes the tongue by reproaches; he instigates the hand by exasperating wrongs to the wrecklessness of murder; to make the

cheat, he presents dishonest gains; to take captive the soul by money, he heaps together mischievous hoards; he promises earthly honours, that he may deprive of heavenly ones; he makes a show of false things, that he may steal away the true; and when he cannot hiddenly deceive, he threatens plainly and openly, holding forth the fear of turbulent persecution to vanquish God's servants-always restless, and always hostile, crafty in peace, and fierce in persecution.

3. Wherefore, beloved brethren, against all the devil's deceiving snares or open threatenings, the mind ought to stand arrayed and armed, ever as ready to repel as the foe is ever ready to attack. And since those darts of his which creep on us in concealment are more frequent, and his more hidden and secret hurling of them is the more severely and frequently effectual to our wounding, in proportion as it is the less perceived, let us also be watchful to understand and repel these, among which is the evil of jealousy and envy. And if any one closely look into this, be will find that nothing should be more guarded against by the Christian, nothing more carefully watched, than being taken captive by envy and malice, that none, entangled in the blind snares of a deceitful enemy, in that the brother is turned by envy to hatred of his brother, should himself be unwittingly destroyed by his own sword. That we may be able more fully to collect and more plainly to perceive this, let us recur to its fount and origin. Let us consider whence arises jealousy, and when and how it begins. For so mischievous an evil will be more easily shunned by us, if both the source and the magnitude of that same evil be known.

4. From this source, even at the very beginnings of the world, the devil was the first who both perished (himself) and destroyed (others). He who was sustained in angelic majesty, he who was accepted and beloved of God, when he beheld man made in the image of God, broke forth into jealousy with malevolent envy-not hurling down another by the instinct of his jealousy before he himself was first hurled down by jealousy, captive before he takes captive, ruined before he ruins others. While, at the instigation of jealousy, he robs man of the grace of immortality conferred, he himself has lost that which he had previously been. How great an evil is that, beloved brethren, whereby an angel fell, whereby that lofty and illustrious grandeur could be defrauded and overthrown, whereby he who deceived was himself deceived! Thenceforth envy rages on the earth, in that he who is about to perish by jealousy obeys the author of his ruin, imitating the devil in his jealousy; as it is written, "But through envy of the devil death entered into the world." Therefore they who are on his side imitate him.

5. Hence, in fine, began the primal hatreds of the new brotherhood, hence the abominable fratricides, in that the unrighteous Cain is jealous of the righteous Abel, in that the wicked persecutes the good with envy and jealousy. So far prevailed the rage of envy to the consummation of that deed of wickedness, that neither the love of his brother, nor the immensity of the crime, nor the fear of God, nor the penalty of the sin, was considered. He was unrighteously stricken who had been the first to show righteousness; he endured hatred who had not known how to hate; he was impiously slain, who, dying, did not resist. And that Esau

was hostile to his brother Jacob, arose from jealousy also. For because the latter had received his father's blessing, the former was inflamed to a persecuting hatred by the brands of jealousy. And that Joseph was sold by his brethren, the reason of their selling him proceeded from envy. When in simplicity, and as a brother to brethren, he set forth to them the prosperity which had been shown to him in visions, their malevolent disposition broke forth into envy. Moreover, that Saul the king hated David, so as to seek by often repeated persecutions to kill him-innocent, merciful, gentle, patient in meekness-what else was the provocation save the spur of jealousy?

Because, when Goliath was slain, and by the aid and condescension of God so great an enemy was routed, the wondering people burst forth with the suffrage of acclamation into praises of David, Saul through jealousy conceived the rage of enmity and persecution. And, not to go to the length of numbering each one, let us observe the destruction of a people that perished once for all. Did not the Jews perish for this reason, that they chose rather to envy Christ than to believe Him? Disparaging those great works which He did, they were deceived by blinding jealousy, and could not open the eyes of their heart to the knowledge of divine things.

6. Considering which things, beloved brethren, let us with vigilance and courage fortify our hearts dedicated to God against such a destructiveness of evil. Let the death of others avail for our safety; let the punishment of the unwise confer health upon the prudent. Moreover, there is no ground for any one to suppose that evil of that kind is confined in one form, or restrained within brief limits in a narrow boundary. The mischief of jealousy, manifold and fruitful, extends widely. It is the root of all evils, the fountain of disasters, the nursery of crimes, the material of transgressions. Thence arises hatred, thence proceeds animosity. Jealousy inflames avarice, in that one cannot be content with what is his own, while he sees another more wealthy. Jealousy stirs up ambition, when one sees another more exalted in honours. When jealousy darkens our perceptions, and reduces the secret agencies of the mind under its command, the fear of God is despised, the teaching of Christ is neglected, the day of judgment is not anticipated. Pride inflates, cruelty embitters, faithlessness prevaricates, impatience agitates, discord rages, anger grows hot; nor can he who has become the subject of a foreign authority any longer restrain or govern himself. By this the bond of the Lord's peace is broken; by this is violated brotherly charity; by this truth is adulterated, unity is divided; men plunge into heresies and schisms when priests are disparaged, when bishops are envied, when a man complains that he himself was not rather ordained, or disdains to suffer that another should be put over him. Hence the man who is haughty through jealousy, and perverse through envy, kicks, hence he revolts, in anger and malice the opponent, not of the man, but of the honour.

7. But what a gnawing worm of the soul is it, what a plague-spot of our thoughts, what a rust of the heart, to be jealous of another, either in respect of his virtue or of his happiness; that is, to hate in him either his own deservings or the divine benefits-to turn the advantages of others into one's own mischief-to be tormented by the prosperity of illustrious men-to make

other people's glory one's own penalty, anti, as it were, to apply a sort of executioner to one's own breast, to bring the tormentors to one's own thoughts and feelings, that they may tear us with intestine pangs, and may smite the secret recesses of the heart with the hoof of malevolence. To such, no food is joyous, no drink can be cheerful. They are ever sighing, and groaning, and grieving; and since envy is never put off by the envious, the possessed heart is rent without intermission day and night. Other ills have their limit; and whatever wrong is done, is bounded by the completion of the crime. In the adulterer the offence ceases when the violation is perpetrated; in the case of the robber, the crime is at rest when the homicide is committed; and the possession of the booty puts an end to the rapacity of the thief; and the completed deception places a limit to the wrong of the cheat. Jealousy has no limit; it is an evil continually enduring, and a sin without end. In proportion as he who is envied has the advantage of a greater success, in that proportion the envious man burns with the fires of jealousy to an increased heat.

8. Hence the threatening countenance, the lowering aspect, pallor in the face, trembling on the lips, gnashing of the teeth, mad words, unbridled revilings, a hand prompt for the violence of slaughter; even if for the time deprived of a sword, yet armed with the hatred of an infuriate mind. And accordingly the Holy Spirit says in the Psalms: "Be not jealous against him who walketh prosperously in his way." And again: "The wicked shall observe the righteous, and shall gnash upon him with his teeth. But God shall laugh at him; for He seeth that his day is coming." The blessed Apostle Paul designates and points out these when he says, "The poison of asps is under their lips, and their mouth is full of cursing and bitterness. Their feet are swift to shed blood, destruction and misery are in their ways, who have not known the way of peace; neither is the fear of God before their eyes."

9. The mischief is much more trifling, and the danger less, when the limbs are wounded with a sword. The cure is easy where the wound is manifest; and when the medicament is applied, the sore that is seen is quickly brought to health. The wounds of jealousy are hidden and secret; nor do they admit the remedy of a healing cure, since they have shut themselves in blind suffering within the lurking-places of the conscience. Whoever you are that are envious and malignant, observe how crafty, mischievous, and hateful you are to those whom you hate. Yet you are the enemy of no one's well-being more than your own. Whoever he is whom you persecute with jealousy, can evade and escape you. You cannot escape yourself. Wherever you may be, your adversary is with you; your enemy is always in your own breast; your mischief is shut up within; you are tied and bound with the links of chains from which yon cannot extricate yourself; you are captive under the tyranny of jealousy; nor will any consolations help you. It is a persistent evil to persecute a man who belongs to the grace of God. It is a calamity without remedy to hate the happy.

10. And therefore, beloved brethren, the Lord, taking thought for this risk, that none should fall into the snare of death through jealousy of his brother, when His disciples asked Him which among them should be the greatest, said, "Who soever shall be least among you all, the same shall be great." He cut off all envy by His reply. He plucked out and tore away

every cause anti matter of gnawing envy. A disciple of Christ must not be jealous, must not be envious. With us there can be no contest for exaltation; from humility we grow to the highest attainments; we have learnt in what way we may be pleasing. And finally, the Apostle Paul, instructing and warning, that we who, illuminated by the light of Christ, have escaped from the darkness of the conversation of night, should walk in the deeds and works of light, writes and says, "The night has passed over, and the day is approaching: let us therefore cast away the works of darkness, and let us put upon us the armour of light. Let us walk honestly, as in the day; not in rioting and drunkenness, not in lusts and wantonness, not in strifes and jealousy." If the darkness has departed from your breast, if the night is scattered therefrom, if the gloom is chased away, if the brightness of day has illuminated your senses, if you have begun to be a man of light, do those things which are Christ's, because Christ is the Light and the Day.

11. Why do you rush into the darkness of jealousy? why do you enfold yourself in the cloud of malice? why do you quench all the light of peace and charity in the blindness of envy? why do you return to the devil, whom you had renounced? why do you stand like Cain? For that he who is jealous of his brother, and has him in hatred, is bound by the guilt of homicide, the Apostle John declares in his epistle, saying, "Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer; and ye know that no murderer hath life abiding in him." And again: "He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes." Whosoever hates, says he, his brother, walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth. For he goeth unconsciously to Gehenna, in ignorance and blindness; he is hurrying into punishment, departing, that is, from the light of Christ, who warns and says, "I am the light of the world. He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." But he follows Christ who stands in His precepts, who walks in the way of His teaching, who follows His footsteps and His ways, who imitates that which Christ both did and taught; in accordance with what Peter also exhorts and warns, saying, "Christ suffered for us, leaving you an example that ye should follow His steps."

12. We ought to remember by what name Christ calls His people, by what title He names His flock. He calls them sheep, that their Christian innocence may be like that of sheep; He calls them lambs, that their simplicity of mind may imitate the simple nature of lambs. Why does the wolf lurk under the garb of sheep? why does he who falsely asserts himself to be a Christian, dishonour the flock of Christ? To put on the name of Christ, and not to go in the way of Christ, what else is it but a mockery of the divine name, but a desertion of the way of salvation; since He Himself teaches and says that he shall come unto life who keeps His commandments, and that he is wise who hears and does His words; that he, moreover, is called the greatest doctor in the kingdom of heaven who thus does and teaches; that, then, will be of advantage to the preacher what has been well and usefully preached, if what is uttered by his mouth is fulfilled by deeds following? But what did the Lord more frequently instil into His disciples, what did He more charge to be guarded and observed among His saving counsels and heavenly precepts, than that with the same love wherewith

He Himself loved the disciples, we also should love one another? And in what manner does he keep either the peace or the love of the Lord, who, when jealousy intrudes, can neither be peaceable nor loving?

13. Thus also the Apostle Paul, when he was urging the merits of peace and charity, and when he was strongly asserting and teaching that neither faith nor alms, nor even the passion itself of the confessor and the martyr, would avail him, unless he kept the requirements of charity entire and inviolate, added, and said: "Charity, is magnanimous, charity is kind, charity envieth not; " teaching, doubtless, and showing that whoever is magnanimous, and kind, and averse from jealousy and rancour, such a one can maintain charity. Moreover, in another place, when he was advising that the man who has already become filled with the Holy Spirit, and a son of God by heavenly birth, should observe nothing but spiritual and divine things, he lays it down, and says: "And I indeed, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. I have fed you with milk, not with meat: for ye were not able hitherto; moreover, neither now are ye able. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there are still among you jealousy, and contention, and strifes, are ye not carnal, and walk as men? "

14. Vices and carnal sins must be trampled down, beloved brethren, and the corrupting plague of the earthly body must be trodden under foot with spiritual vigour, lest, while we are turned back again to the conversation of the old man, we be entangled in deadly snares, even as the apostle, with foresight and wholesomeness, forewarned us of this very thing, and said: "Therefore, brethren, let us not live after the flesh; for if ye live after the flesh, ye shall begin to die; but if ye, through the Spirit, mortify the deeds of the flesh, ye shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God they are the sons of God. If we are the sons of God, if we are already beginning to be His temples, if, having received the Holy Spirit, we are living holily and spiritually, if we have raised our eyes from earth to heaven, if we have lifted our hearts, filled with God and Christ, to things above and divine, let us do nothing but what is worthy of God and Christ, even as the apostle arouses and exhorts us, saying: "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is sitting at the right hand of God; occupy your minds with things that are above, not with things which are upon the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. But when Christ, who is your life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory.

Let us, then, who in baptism have both died and been buried in respect of the carnal sins of the old man, who have risen again with Christ in the heavenly regeneration, both think upon and do the things which are Christ's, even as the same apostle again teaches and counsels, saying: "The first man is of the dust of the earth; the second man is from heaven. Such as he is from the earth, such also are they who are from the earth and such as He the heavenly is, such also are they who are heavenly. As we have borne the image of him who is of the earth, let us also bear the image of Him who is from heaven. But we cannot bear the heavenly image, unless in that condition wherein we have already begun to be, we show forth the likeness of Christ.

15. For this is to change what you had been, and to begin to be what you were not, that the divine birth might shine forth in you, that the godly discipline might respond to God, the Father, that in the honour and praise of living, God may be glorified in man; as He Himself exhorts, and warns, and promises to those who glorify Him a reward in their turn, saying, "Them that glorify me I will glorify, and he who despiseth me shall be despised." For which glorification the Lord, forming and preparing us, and the Son of God instilling the likeness of God the Father, says in His Gospel: "Ye have heard that it hath been said, Thou shalt love thy neighbour, and hate thine enemy. But I say unto you, Love your enemies, and pray for them which persecute you; that ye may be the children of your Father which is in heaven, who maketh His sun to rise on the good and on the evil, and sendeth rain upon the just and on the unjust." If it is a source of joy and glory to men to have children like to themselves-and it is more agreeable to have begotten an offspring then when the remaining progeny responds to the parent with like lineaments-how much greater is the gladness in God the Father, when any one is so spiritually born that in his acts and praises the divine eminence of race is announced! What a palm of righteousness is it, what a crown to be such a one as that the Lord should not say of you, "I have begotten and brought up children, but they have despised me!" Let Christ rather applaud you, and invite you to the reward, saying, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, receive the kingdom which is prepared for you from the beginning of the world."

16. The mind must be strengthened, beloved brethren, by these meditations. By exercises of this kind it must be confirmed against all the darts of the devil. Let there be the divine reading in the hands, the Lord's thoughts in the mind; let constant prayer never cease at all; let saving labour persevere. Let us be always busied in spiritual actions, that so often as the enemy approaches, however often he may try to come near, he may find the breast closed and armed against him. For a Christian man's crown is not only that which is received in the time of persecution: peace also has its crowns, wherewith the victors, from a varied and manifold engagement, are crowned, when their adversary is prostrated and subdued. To have overcome lust is the palm of continency. To have resisted against anger, against injury, is the crown of patience. It is a triumph over avarice to despise money. It is the praise of faith, by trust in the future, to suffer the adversity of the world. And he who is not haughty in prosperity, obtains glory for his humility; and he who is disposed to the mercifulness of cherishing the poor, obtains the retribution of a heavenly treasure; and he who knows not to be jealous, and who with one heart and in meekness loves his brethren, is honoured with the recompense of love and peace. In this course of virtues we daily run; to these palms and crowns of justice we attain without intermission of time.

17. To these rewards that you also may come who had been possessed with jealousy and rancour, cast away all that malice wherewith you were before held fast, and be reformed to the way of eternal life in the footsteps of salvation. Tear out from your breast thorns and thistles, that the Lord's seed may enrich you with a fertile produce, that the divine and spiritual cornfield may abound to the plentifulness of a fruitful harvest. Cast out the poison of gall, cast out the virus of discords. Let the mind which the malice of the serpent had

infected be purged; let all bitterness which had settled within be softened by the sweetness of Christ. If you take both meat and drink from the sacrament of the cross, let the wood which at Mara availed in a figure for sweetening the taste, avail to you in in reality for soothing your softened breast; and you shall not strive for a medicine for your increasing health. Be cured by that whereby you had been wounded. Love those whom you previously had hated; favour those whom you envied with unjust disparagements. Imitate good men, if you are able to follow them; but it you are not able to follow them, at least rejoice with them, and congratulate those who are better than you. Make yourself a sharer with them in united love; make yourself their associate in the alliance of charity and the bond of brotherhood. Your debts shall be remitted to you when you yourself shall have forgiven. Your sacrifices shall be received when you shall come in peace to God. Your thoughts and deeds shall be directed from above, when you consider those things which are divine and righteous, as it is written: "Let the heart of a man consider righteous things, that his steps may be directed by the Lord."

18. And you have many things to consider. Think of paradise, whither Cain does not enter, who by jealousy slew his brother. Think of the heavenly kingdom, to which the Lord does not admit any but those who are of one heart and mind. Consider that those alone can be called sons of God who are peacemakers, who in heavenly birth and by the divine law are made one, and respond to the likeness of God the Father and of Christ. Consider that we are standing under the eyes of God, that we are pursuing the course of our conversation and our life, with God Himself looking on and judging, that we may then at length be able to attain to the result of beholding Him, if we now delight Him who sees us, by our actions, if we show ourselves worthy of His favour and indulgence; if we, who are always to please Him in His kingdom, previously please Him in the world.

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