

Love is NOT Jealous Love does NOT Envy

(1 Corinthians 13:4)

There are two New Testament Greek words, which are commonly translated as "envy." One of them occurs here in 1 Corinthians 13:4. The differences between these two words (and the ways they are used) are very instructive, so both are included in this study.

Pay attention to the introduction, which explains these differences.

- Introduction - Jealousy/Zeal & Envy
- The New Testament Greek Words (OPTIONAL)

The Word Studies:

- Jealousy & Zeal
- Envy

Introduction to Jealousy/Zeal and Envy

It may surprise you that the word "zeal" is included in the above title. Amazingly, the word "jealousy" (or "envy") that is found in 1 Corinthians 13 is sometimes translated that way! It all depends on what the jealousy/zeal is being directed toward. At times, this word is used in a *positive* way, as something good! (The second word examined in this study, often translated as "envy," is almost *never* used in a positive way.)

INTRODUCTION - Two Words Translated as "Jealousy" and "Envy"

In the *English* language, these words are sometimes used interchangeably. Often one translation will use "jealousy," whereas another will use "envy" to translate the same passage. And, based on the context in which the word occurs, this may be perfectly acceptable.

This word study is based on the New Testament *Greek* words. And though the meanings may overlap, there is a somewhat different focus for each of the word groups. This contrast, shown below, is based on Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words. (The Greek words themselves are listed on a separate page.)

THE CONTRAST BETWEEN JEALOUSY AND ENVY

Envy:

It desires to deprive another of what he has. (This word group almost always has a negative connotation. But James 4:5 shows a potential "positive" use of the word.)

Jealousy:

It wants the same sort of thing for itself (not necessarily taking it away from the other). (This word group is commonly used in both "negative" and "positive" ways. It is frequently translated as "zeal.")

JEALOUSY AND 1 CORINTHIANS 13:4

Jealousy (as defined above) is used in 1 Corinthians 13:4: "Love is not jealous." (Some translations: "Love does not envy.") Yet when we examine the New Testament concept of jealousy, we discover that it can be used in both good and bad ways. In fact, the same word is often translated as "zeal"! The primary difference is whether the jealousy/zeal is an expression of love for God and neighbor, or love for self. The verse in 1 Corinthians refers only to the second of these two (love for self).

The concept of envy is included in this study because it is a similar concept (though with a somewhat different emphasis). It does not occur in 1 Corinthians 13, however.

Both words occur in the same context in Galatians 5:19-21, 26, and James 4:2, 5.

The New Testament Greek Words for "Jealousy" and "Envy"

This page is OPTIONAL. You do NOT have to study page (unless you like Greek word definitions), in order to benefit from the word studies.

JEALOUSY and ZEAL

Both are the *same* word in the Greek New Testament!

zeloo

to be jealous -

- (in a good sense) to strive, desire, exert oneself earnestly;
 1. ... for something (if a thing is the object) - Example: 1 Corinthians 12:31 (for spiritual gifts)
 2. to be deeply concerned about someone, to court someone's favor (a person is the object) - Example: Galatians 4:17a
 3. the expression of zeal (in an absolute sense) - Example: Galatians 4:18
- (in a bad sense) to be filled with jealousy, envy - Example: Acts 17:5
- Verses that use this word:
 - Acts 7:9; 17:5; 1 Corinthians 12:31; 13:4; 14:1,39; 2 Corinthians 11:2; Galatians 4:17-18; James 4:2
 - Revelation 3:19 [KJV only; others have zealeuo, below.]

zeleuo

- (a different form of zeloo, but basically the same meaning): to be eager, earnest
- Verses that use this word:
 - Revelation 3:19 [KJV uses the above form of the word, zeloo]

zelotes

zealot, enthusiast:

- one who ardently desires [to join, promote, actively support, possess or defend someone or something] - Example: Acts 22:3 (zealous for God)
- a Zealot, a member of a fanatical Jewish political party
- Verses that use this word:

- Acts 21:20; 22:3; 1 Corinthians 14:12; Galatians 1:14; Titus 2:14
- 1 Peter 3:13 [KJV = uses a word translated "follower" (imitator), but the meaning is approximately the same (KJV: being a "follower" of what is good; OTHERS: being "eager" to do what is good)]
- A "Zealot": Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13

zelos

- (in a good sense) zeal, ardor
- (in a bad sense) jealousy, envy
- Verses that use this word:
 - John 2:17; Acts 5:17; 13:45; Romans 10:2; 13:13; 1 Corinthians 3:3; 2 Corinthians 7:7,11; 9:2; 11:2; 12:20; Galatians 5:20; Philippians 3:6; Hebrews 10:27; James 3:14; 3:16
 - Colossians 4:13 [KJV only; OTHERS: concern, hard work (KJV: "zealous" in prayer; OTHERS: "concern" expressed in prayer or "diligence" in praying)]

parazelo

- to provoke to jealousy, to make jealous
- Verses that use this word:
 - Romans 10:19; 11:11,14; 1 Corinthians 10:22

ENVY

phthonos

- envy
- Verses that use this word:
 - Matthew 27:18; Mark 15:10; Romans 1:29; Galatians 5:21; Philippians 1:15; 1 Timothy 6:4; Titus 3:3; James 4:5; 1 Peter 2:1

phthoneo

- to envy
- Verses that use this word:
 - Galatians 5:26

In the New Testament, this word is always used in a bad sense (except possibly in James 4:5). This is in contrast with jealous / zealous, which can be either good or bad.

JEALOUSY and ZEAL

Sections:

- PART 1: It Can Be Either Good or Bad
 - PART 2: Zeal or Jealousy, When it Is Related to God
 - PART 3: Zeal or Jealousy, When it Is Related to People
 - PART 4: An In-depth Look at the Bad Kind of Zeal/jealousy
 - 1. Section 1: Things Associated with Jealousy
 - 2. Section 2: Our Proper Response to Jealousy
 - PART 5: Various Other Aspects & Uses of the Word
 - PART 6: A Few Comments about Zeal for God in the Old Testament
 - Things to Consider
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PART 1: JEALOUSY/ZEAL CAN BE EITHER GOOD OR BAD

A. It can be good...

1. Good if it has a good purpose
 - Galatians 4:18 - Zeal for others / interest in others is good, IF the purpose is good. [In this specific instance, described in v. 17, the purpose was bad.]
2. Godly zeal: it does exist!
 - 2 Corinthians 11:2 - Paul: had a godly jealousy/zeal for the Corinthian's spiritual well-being.
3. One of the ways it can be produced: the result of godly sorrow and repentance
 - 2 Corinthians 7:7,11 - Zeal / intense concern for Paul's well-being: It was the result of godly sorrow / repentance (concerning things Paul wrote to them about). This zeal (& other characteristics they now had) brought encouragement to Paul.

4. God commands people to have zeal (along w/ repentance)
 - o Revelation 3:19 - Be zealous & repent of lukewarmness (also: God rebukes / disciplines those he loves)

B. It can be bad...

1. Bad when it is *not* an expression of love
 - o 1 Corinthians 13:4 - Love is not jealous.
2. Bad when it is an expression of our old, corrupt nature (the "flesh")
 - o Galatians 5:19-21 - a list of "the works of the flesh" - People who have these things in their life will NOT inherit the kingdom of heaven.
 - o See also Romans 13:13 (v. 12-14), below.
3. Bad when it is a "deed of darkness"
 - o Romans 13:13 (v. 12-14) - We are told to put aside the "deeds of darkness" (v. 12) - to walk (live) ... without jealousy. (V. 14: It is an expression of the "flesh" - our corrupt nature. And we must not yield to the desires of that nature.)
4. It results in humiliation & grief in godly people (when they see it in others who claim to be "Christian").
 - o 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 - Paul to Corinthians: I'm afraid I'll find you with ... jealousy... that God will humble me & I'll be grieved...
5. This type of jealousy /zeal is worldly
 - o 1 Corinthians 3:3 - you are acting worldly, like "mere men"
6. We are commanded to NOT have it
 - o Romans 13:13 (v. 12-14) - walk (live) ... without jealousy
7. If we have this type of jealousy / zeal, we are not to be proud about it, or lie about how evil it is!
 - o James 3:14
8. This type of jealousy / zeal will hinder the answering of our prayers
 - o James 4:2-3 - You don't receive what you ask for because you ask with evil motives.

PART 2: ZEAL OR JEALOUSY, WHEN IT IS RELATED TO GOD

A. Zeal for God

1. It is bad if done in ignorance.
 - o Acts 22:3 - Paul, before his conversion, was zealous for God and persecuted the Christians
 - o Romans 10:2 - The unsaved Jews had a zeal for God, but it was based on ignorance, rather than on knowledge. (They were trying to gain

righteousness through their own efforts.) [NOTE: Proverbs 19:2 makes a comment about zeal that is not based on knowledge.]

2. Zeal for God's House - It showed Jesus' attitude of zeal & honor for God himself.
 - John 2:17 (see v. 13+) - Jesus opposed those who turned the temple into a means for financial gain. His Father's house was NOT to be turned into a marketplace.
 - NOTE: No other verses in the New Testament specifically mention "zeal for God" in a good sense, but there are several passages in the Old Testament that do. [See PART 6 of this study.]

B. Zeal For the Law [ceremonial rituals], etc.

1. It was good/acceptable for the Christian Jews to have this type of zeal. [NOTE: They were *not* attempting to gain salvation through it.]
 - Acts 21:20 - Thousands of believing Jews... all zealous for the Law [v. 21+ They had been falsely told that Paul was telling Jews to abandon the Law, whereas he was actually only telling Gentiles to not adopt it.]
2. It is bad if this zeal is an attempt to earn salvation, or if man-made tradition is actually what is being followed.
 - Galatians 1:13-14 - Paul was zealous for his ancestral traditions more than his peers were.
 - Philippians 3:6 - Paul was so zealous of his Judaism that he persecuted the church

PART 3: ZEAL/JEALOUSY, WHEN IT IS RELATED TO PEOPLE

A. The good type of zeal / jealousy - examples: [This includes having intense concern for, or interest in, other people.]

1. Jealous for / intensely desiring another's spiritual well-being
 - 2 Corinthians 11:2 - Paul: jealous for the Corinthian's spiritual well-being. He does not want them to be led astray from a pure devotion to Christ. He wanted them for God; false teachers wanted to take them away!
 - 2 Corinthians 7:7,11 - Zeal / intense concern for Paul's well-being: produced by godly sorrow / repentance (concerning things Paul had to write to them about). This brought encouragement to Paul.
2. Zealously/diligently praying for others
 - Colossians 4:13 [KJV] - zeal / concern in praying for you (Colossians, etc.) [most translations: concern / diligence (hard work) in praying... . Though from a different Greek word, the meaning is almost the same.]

3. Zealous to help others
 - 2 Corinthians 9:2 - Enthusiastic zeal to help (give to the needs of) others - it encouraged others to also help
4. Zealous to do good
 - Titus 2:14 - Jesus saved us for this purpose: that we might be zealous to do good works.
 - 1 Peter 3:13 - If you are zealous for what is good, there is no reason for people to harm you... but even if you are harmed, you are blessed. [KJV: if you imitate what is good...]
5. Zealous to use one's spiritual gifts -See section C, below.

B. The bad type of zeal / jealousy - examples:

1. Jealous that people are interested in hearing the good news about Jesus (= having an intense desire to keep them away from the good news)
 - Acts 5:27 - The religious leaders were so filled with jealousy [zeal for their own "cause"] that they arrested the apostles and put them in jail.
 - Acts 13:45 - The Jews - jealous that so many people wanted to hear Paul's message, that they started speaking against what Paul said.
 - Acts 17:5 - The Jews - jealous when so many people became convinced of Paul's message, that they started a riot.
2. Jealous because of favoritism shown to another
 - Acts 7:9 - Patriarchs were jealous of Joseph (who was shown favoritism by his father, etc. - see Gen. 37) Of course, the favoritism was not necessarily good, either! But it was not a legitimate excuse for their own sin.
3. Zealous to gain converts who would then become zealous followers of those who converted them (instead of zealous followers of the truth of the gospel).
 - Galatians 4:17 - The false teachers were zealously attempting to win-over the Galatians, so that the Galatians would zealously follow them.
4. Zealous / jealous to exalt one leader above another
 - 1 Corinthians 3:3 - jealousy & strife among the Corinthians - arguing over which leader was the best
 - Galatians 4:17 - This would also happen once the false teachers had gained their converts. (See section "3," above.)

C. Zeal in the use of spiritual gifts - it can be good or bad.

1. It is good if the focus is on the gifts that build-up others
 - 1 Corinthians 14:1 - Desire [have a zeal for] spiritual gifts, but focus on the gifts that benefit others.
 - 1 Corinthians 14:12 - Instructions to those who ARE zealous of spiritual gifts: Focus on those gifts that build-up others in the church.
 - 1 Corinthians 14:39 - [Illustrating the proper focus] Be eager (zealous) to prophecy [a gift that builds-up others], but don't forbid speaking in

tongues [a gift that doesn't build-up others]. (v. 40 - Do all in a proper and orderly manner.)

2. Zeal for gifts can be bad if love is not given the highest priority
 - o 1 Corinthians 12:31 - Two possible interpretations (based on context): 1) Go ahead and desire (be zealous for) good gifts, but place your highest focus on love, or your gift will be worthless (see ch. 13). 2) All of you are zealously desiring (going after) what you consider to be the "best" gifts, but you need to go after love, instead.

PART 4: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE BAD KIND OF ZEAL/JEALOUSY

SECTION 1: THINGS ASSOCIATED WITH JEALOUSY / BAD ZEAL

[These things show how bad jealousy really is.]

A. Persecuting & opposing those who preach the truth

- Acts 5:17(+) - The apostles were put in jail
- Acts 13:45 - They opposed Paul's message & spoke evil things about the truth
- Acts 17:5 - Rioting, turmoil, false accusations...
- Galatians 1:13-14 - Persecuting the church of God, being zealously fanatical for ancestral traditions
- Philippians 3:6 - Persecuting the church

B. Sinful conduct of various kinds

- Romans 13:13 - wild parties, drunkenness, sexual immorality & promiscuity, rivalry
 - 1 Corinthians 3:3 - strife or quarreling
 - 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 - quarreling, anger, arguing, slander, gossip, arrogance, disorder; also impure living, sexual sin & sensuality
 - Galatians 5:19-21 - a list of "the works of the flesh (corrupt nature)" - People who have these characteristics in their lives will NOT inherit the kingdom of heaven.
 - Philippians 3:6 (& context) - high religious "standards"
 - James 3:14 - selfish ambition
 - James 3:16 - worldly, unspiritual, demonic "wisdom"; disorder & every kind of evil practice
 - James 4:2 - lustful greed, murder, fighting & quarreling
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PART 4: AN IN-DEPTH LOOK AT THE BAD KIND OF ZEAL/JEALOUSY

SECTION 2: OUR PROPER RESPONSE TO JEALOUSY

A. Doing things that are incompatible with jealousy (things we should be doing anyway!)

- Romans 13:13 (v. 12-14) - Behaving properly / decently; "clothed" with Jesus Christ
- 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 - Exhibiting the characteristics of love
- 2 Corinthians 7:7,11 - [Various attitudes regarding sin & godly conduct; concern for others (Paul), etc.]
- Galatians 5:20, 22-23 - Having the fruit of the Spirit

[Of course, there are LOTS of things mentioned in the New Testament, which are incompatible with jealousy. These are just the verses that contain the word "jealousy" (or the equivalent) somewhere within the context.]

B. Some specific responses we can have

1. Continuing to obey God
 - Acts 5:17 (see v. 29 & the whole context) - The apostles reply, when told to stop teaching in Jesus' name (by the jealous / envious religious leaders): We should obey God, rather than people.
 2. Continuing to speak the message
 - Acts 13:45 (v. 46-47) - Being willing to speak the Word to those who were willing to listen (turning away from those who were unwilling to listen)
 3. Moving to a location where people are willing to hear the message (applies to those who have been sent out to preach the word)
 - Acts 17:5 (v. 10-11+) - The Jews - jealous when so many people became convinced of Paul's message... Paul & Silas went to Berea
 - NOTE: This doesn't apply to everyone. Though Paul & Silas left, there were other Christians who remained there.
 4. Warning them about their sin; speaking the truth to them
 - 1 Corinthians 3:3 (+ context) - "You are being worldly." (V. 3) "Stop boasting about people." (V. 21) "We are only servants of God (and God is the one you should focus on)."
 5. Being filled with grief / humility
 - 2 Corinthians 12:20-21 - Paul to Corinthians: I'm afraid I'll find you with ... jealousy... that God will humble me & I'll be grieved...
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PART 5: MISC. OTHER ASPECTS & USES OF THE WORD

A. About making others jealous

1. People making God jealous - it's a dangerous thing to do!
 - 1 Corinthians 10:22 - [It can happen if we try to have fellowship with BOTH God & demons...] Are we trying to provoke him to jealousy? Are we stronger than he? [Think about what could happen if God decided to show his strength! The things mentioned at the beginning of the chapter (punishments inflicted upon Israel) are intended to be a lesson for us!]
2. Paul making Israel jealous (This would occur when the Israelites saw the Gentiles receiving blessings that were originally intended for Israel.) Paul hoped that it would result in some Jews turning to Christ
 - Romans 10:19 (prophetic - quote from Deut. 32:21 about Israel's judgment for apostasy) - I will make them jealous / envious by those who are "not a people."
 - Romans 11:11 - Salvation has come to the Gentiles, to make Israel jealous
 - Romans 11:14 - Paul considers his ministry to be a very honorable / glorious one, in the hope that, through it, some of his fellow-Jews will become envious of the blessings the Gentiles are receiving... and want to be saved, too! [Don't forget that these blessings were originally intended for the Jews, but because of their sins, the Gentiles now have the opportunity to receive them.]

B. A "zealous fire" - will consume those who are unrepentant / those who reject the truth

- Hebrews 10:27 - the only thing left for them to look forward to is judgment and raging fire which will consume God's enemies.

C. A "Zealot" (One who was a member of a certain Jewish political party that struggled for political independence from Rome.)

- Luke 6:15; Acts 1:13 - one of the apostles: a Zealot named Simon [Note: he was also called a "Canaanite," not from the early name for Palestine (Canaan), but from a Chaldean word (kananites) for "zealous": Matthew 10:4; Mark 3:18. Some translations use the word "Zealot" in these two verses, since that term is more familiar and causes less confusion.]
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PART 6: A FEW COMMENTS ABOUT ZEAL FOR GOD IN THE Old Testament

A. Zeal for God & his ways

- Elijah - 1 Kings 19:10,14 - Elijah talking to the Lord: He described himself as being very zealous for God (in contrast to the rest of the nation). He was told that there were 7000 others who were also loyal to the Lord.
- Jehu (maybe) - 2 Kings 10:16 - He seems to have started this way. But something apparently went wrong. By the time he was finished with his "mission" of destroying Ahab's idolatrous family, he himself was deserving of judgment. (See Hosea 1:4.) Maybe he went too far, by killing people who were innocent. Or maybe it was because he did not remain faithful to the Lord, but turned to the idolatry that Jereboam introduced into Israel. (2 Kings 10:31)

B. Zeal for God's honor

- Phineas (a priest) - Numbers 25:11, 13 - (read the context) He killed two people who were dishonoring God by their sexual immorality and idolatry. Because of what he did, the plague God sent against the nation stopped. (Read 1 Corinthians 10... we should learn from Israel's example and NOT do what they did!)

C. Zeal for God's words

- (Author of Psalm 119) - Psalm 119:139 - His zeal was so intense that it wore him out! Contrast this with the attitude of his enemies, who were quick to dismiss them from their minds.

D. Zeal for God's house (Implied: a zeal for God)

- David - Psalm 69:9 - As with the author of Psalm 119, David's zeal was so intense that it wore him out! Those who hated God were venting their hatred on him (David), because of his love for & loyalty to God - shown by his attitude toward God's house (the temple). This is also a prophetic reference to Christ, and is quoted in John 2:17.

Of course, there is another sense in which God *doesn't* need to have humans "zealously defend" him. After all, he is God and can take care of himself!

THINGS TO CONSIDER:

- Summarize the difference between the good and bad types of zeal/jealousy. How can you distinguish between them? We need to strive to have the one and to get rid of the other.
- How is godly zeal/jealousy a display of love? How is evil zeal/jealousy incompatible with love (1 Corinthians 13:4)?
- How much godly zeal/jealousy do you have in your heart? What can/will you do, so that it might increase? How much worldly (sinful) zeal/jealousy do you have in your heart? What can/will you do, so that it might decrease?
- How do you respond when you see the bad type of zeal/jealousy... 1) in yourself? 2) in others (both when it is directed against you, and when it is directed against someone else)? If you find that you have difficulty responding in a way that honors God, what are some things you can begin to do this week, to start changing the way you think and act? (This is the meaning of the word "repentance.")
- Why should you have godly zeal/jealousy? What are some specific things you can do this week that will increase your godly zeal... 1) in the way it is expressed toward God? 2) in the way it is expressed toward other people?
- How can you encourage godly zeal/jealousy in others?

**** REMEMBER THIS! ****

To whatever extent we succeed in replacing sinful zeal/jealousy with godly zeal/jealousy, we must give God the praise, rather than ourselves. Such changes are possible only because of changes God has made in our hearts. Without these changes, it is the natural inclination of our hearts to choose what is evil.

APPLY IT TO YOUR "EVERY DAY" LIFE!

Most people use the word "zeal" only in reference to "religious things" or "fanaticism." Yet the same action and heart attitude can exist in any area of life. The question is: On what do you focus your attention? What types of things do you like to think about throughout the day? If you could do whatever you wanted, what types of things would you choose to do? Contrast these things with the things you don't normally think about, or wouldn't normally choose to do. (Example: Some people claim that they love God, and that he has "first place" in their life. But they focus all their attention on...) Now answer the following questions:

What types of things do you focus your attention on? What do you like to think about and do? In other words, what is your zeal/jealousy focused on? [If your focus is on something you have (or are), it could probably be called "zeal," whereas if your focus is on something you don't have (or aren't) it could probably be called "jealousy."] Based on your answer to these questions, as well as what you learned in this study, determine what "plan of action" you need to work on, this week.

[Having considered the questions in this section, if you now view zeal/jealousy in a somewhat different way, you may wish to look again at the questions under the section entitled: "Things to Consider."]

The type of jealousy that is focused on in this study places emphasis on the desire to have, or keep something. If you find that you have a desire not only for you to *have* something, but also for someone else to *not have* it, you may benefit from the study entitled "Envy."

ENVY

- PART 1: ENVY (All passages except James 4:5)
 - PART 2: ENVY in James 4:5
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PART 1: ENVY (All passages except James 4:5):

1. WHAT IS IT / WHY DOES IT EXIST?

- a. It is a characteristic of the wicked - of people in their "natural" (unsaved) condition - Romans 1:29
- b. It is a "deed of the flesh," opposed to the "fruit of the Spirit" - Galatians 5:21 (+ context)
- c. It is one of the "fruits" of the teachings & ways of false teachers - 1 Timothy 6:4
- d. It is a characteristic of life without Christ - of what we were before we were saved - Titus 3:3

2. IT CAN EVEN BE IN THE HEARTS OF "RELIGIOUS" PEOPLE

- a. Because of it, religious leaders wanted to kill Jesus - Matthew 27:18, Mark 15:10
- b. It can even influence the hidden motives of those who "preach" Christ - Philippians 1:15

3. ABOUT THOSE WHO HAVE IT

- a. It is the result of first rejecting one's knowledge of God - Romans 1:29
- b. Those who have it will NOT inherit the kingdom of God - Galatians 5:21

4. WHAT ARE WE TO DO WITH IT?

- a. We MUST get rid of it (& other such characteristics) and grow up in our salvation - 1 Peter 2:1
- b. We MUST keep in step with (follow the leading & ways of) the Spirit, rather than being filled with characteristics such as envy - Galatians 5:25-26

TO THINK ABOUT...

How serious is envy? Is there envy in your heart? If so, what must you do about it? Is dealing with it optional (contrasted with being mandatory)? What are the consequences of not dealing with it?

PART 2: ENVY in James 4:5

- varying interpretations on what James meant:

THE PROBLEM:

If you would compare several translations of this verse, you would discover that there are different opinions as to how this verse should be interpreted. The problem is due to two main factors:

1. Even though James begins by saying, "Scripture says...," he is not directly quoting Scripture. Rather, he is expressing a "theme" or "focus" that is found in Scripture.
2. Certain parts of the verse can be legitimately interpreted in two ways: Does the word "spirit" refer to man's spirit, or to the Holy Spirit? And who is being envious - God or people?

Interestingly, there are two main interpretations of this verse, and BOTH of them agree with major themes found in the Word! We might not be completely sure which view *James* was thinking about when he wrote verse 5. But we can be certain that, with either view, we will have truth that is found in the Bible. We don't need to be afraid that we will be led into error!

VIEW #1: God wants our complete loyalty.

A person cannot follow both the ways of God and the ways of the world. Verse 4 describes those who attempt to do so, as being spiritually "adulterous." View #1 carries the theme of verse 4 into verse 5. In this case, verse 5 expresses a picture or illustration of a person (= God) who intensely longs for ("envies") the affections of his unfaithful spouse (= the people who claim to love God). In this view, "envy" is used in a good sense, since a person has a right to expect the undivided affections of his/her spouse. If

we are like this (trying to follow both God and the world), we need to change our ways, and in humility (verse 6), turn back to God.

With this view, the general flow of thought through these verses is as follows:

Verse 4: You cannot love both God and the world.

Verse 5: God wants your complete loyalty.

Verse 6: If you humble yourself [& give God your complete loyalty], God will show grace/kindness to you.

TRANSLATION:

With this view, the word "spirit" (in verse 5) can be interpreted as either the human spirit or the Holy Spirit:

IF Human spirit: "He (God) longs for our spirit (which he put in us)."

IF Holy Spirit: "His Spirit (which he put in us) longs for us."

VIEW #2: The human spirit is filled with envy.

With this view, the word "envy" is used in a bad sense. God made us perfect and upright (see Genesis 1& 2), but WE have turned to sin. (We can't blame God for our condition. Compare to Ecclesiastes 7:29)

This view considers verse 5 to be an explanation for why we have the tendency to do the things mentioned in verses 1-3: We desire things we don't have and pray with wrong motives because of the "envy" that is in our hearts. And this is the reason we need to humble ourselves before God (v. 6).

With this view, the general flow of thought through these verses is as follows:

Verses 1-3: You have evil desires and pray with evil motives. [= You are doing things the way the world would!]

Verse 4: Don't you realize that you cannot love both God (his ways) and the world (it's ways)?

Verse 5: You have an inherent tendency to desire (go after) the things of the world...

Verse 6: But if you humble yourself, God will show grace/kindness to you.

TRANSLATION:

"The human spirit, which he (God) put in us, is filled with envy."

CONCLUSION:

Both interpretations express truthful statements, and each complements the other: As View #2 says, we have a tendency to go after the world's ways. But as View #1 says, God wants our undivided loyalty.

Since both views are true, there is a third alternative we can choose: We can decide to just not "worry" about it, and to accept both views as expressing truths found in the Bible. And someday, when we see James in person, we can ask him which view he was specifically thinking about when he wrote verse 5!

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT:

What is your devotion to God like? Do you "flirt" with sin? What is God's reaction toward divided loyalties? What is God's reaction to you? [If your loyalties are divided, take some time to consider the seriousness of your situation. God gives you the opportunity to change - if you are willing to submit to his Word. Don't throw your opportunity away!]