Envy, Jealousy and Covetousness

Envy is one of those things the Bible says makes us worthy of death (Rom. 1:29-32), defiles us (Mark 7:22), and will keep us out of heaven (Gal 5:19-21). So, it’s vitally important that we understand what it is and that we purge it from ourselves. Covetousness and jealousy are similarly condemned.

Envy and jealousy are very similar and are related to covetousness. Jealousy is almost interchangeable with envy. Space does not allow to fully develop the nuances involved, but if you think of a few examples or sentences using them you will see there are some subtle differences.

According to my paraphrase of Wikipedia, envy is an emotion which occurs when a person lacks what they think is another's superior quality, achievement, or possession and either desires it or wishes that the other lacked it. Aristotle defined envy as pain at the sight of another’s good fortune, stirred by those who have what we think we ought to have.

Oxford Living Dictionary defines envy as “a feeling of discontented or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or luck”.

To desire to better yourself or your situation is obviously not wrong. In fact, we are to pursue growth and improvement as Christians and use our talents the best we can. The sin is in the discontentment with God’s blessings, the coveting of others’ talents, attributes, or things. It’s in the hatred that can develop when we perceive ourselves as unable to have what others have or are unhappy when others have successes we did not.

God has blessed us all and through envy and jealousy we are showing a lack of appreciation to God for what we do have. Furthermore, we are not following the command to rejoice with those who rejoice (Rom. 12:15). As we “consider one another in order to provoke to love and good works” (Heb. 10:24), let’s not allow envy and jealousy to get in the way of that and in the way of our eternal salvation.

For the elders,
Gary Woodall