"LET NOT THINE HEART ENVY SINNERS"

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"Let not thine heart envy sinners" (Proverbs 23:17). This exhortation may seem needless and strange. From the perspective of many sinners, "Christians think they are better than everyone else"; so they have no occasion to envy sinners. From the Christian perspective, while Christians acknowledge their standing is by grace rather than by personal accomplishment, they have already made the conscious decision to leave the paths of sin.

However, the exhortation not to envy sinners is absolutely necessary. Its necessity is seen in the simple fact that God inspired it; and thus, it is "profitable" toward making us "perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). And God inspired other similar warnings against envying sinners (cf. Psalm 37:1; 73:3; Prov.24:1). Also, its necessity is seen in the number of people who abandon the truth. Why, when someone has successfully "bought the truth" would he "sell it" for nothing? (cf. Proverbs 23:23). It is because Christians fall into the danger of envying sinners. Christians can think they are "missing out" on something. This is what happened to Demas - "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica" (2 Timothy 4:10). Perhaps Christians desire the freedom from persecution that sinners enjoy; perhaps Christians desire the drug- and alcohol-induced escapes from reality that sinners often take; perhaps Christians desire sexual indulgence without marriage. But the following are just a few compelling reasons why we must not let our hearts envy sinners.

**Sinners are without God.** Sin cannot come into God's presence, and neither can those who remain defiled by sin. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son " (2 John 9).

**The pleasures of sin only last for a season.** "By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Hebrews 11:24-25). Yes, there can be pleasures associated with sin. Yes, it does require faith to forsake those pleasures. But those pleasures are infinitely short-lived in contrast to the eternal riches of heaven.

**Sinners will reap misery.** From His throne, God proclaimed, "He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death" (Revelation 21:7-8). Paul wrote, "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Galatians 6:8).

**Sinners are deceived.** Immediately preceding his aforementioned statement about sowing and reaping, Paul warns, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Galatians 6:7). Sinners are self-deceived, or deceived by others, into believing they will not have to reap what they have sown.

**You would be in a worse place than other sinners.** Peter lamented those who apostatize
from the faith, saying, "For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled there, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning. For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire " (2 Peter 2:20-22, emphasis LM).

What do sinners possess that we should envy? Rather than envying sinners, we should pity them, "And of some have compassion, making a difference: and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh " (Jude 22-23).

"Let not thine heart envy sinners: but be thou in the fear of the LORD all the day long" (Proverbs 23:17).