

Do Not Envy Sinners
Proverbs 23:17
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Please listen to Solomon's advice in Proverbs 23:17:

Do not let your heart envy sinners,
But live in the fear of the Lord always.

It would be impossible to find better advice. And it is practical and easy to understand. Notice how it is stated in a "not/but" form, the way much Bible instruction is given. Don't do that, but do this. Not the envy of sinners, but the fear of the Lord. Let's analyze what that means.

A sinner, according to 1 John 3:4, is one who transgresses God's law. There is no reason to envy sinners. Oh, they may appear to be doing well, prospering and enjoying life. Many a rich person has gotten his wealth in ungodly ways. And Hebrews 11:25 recognizes that there is pleasure in sin, though it refers to the *passing* pleasure of sin. Some sinners may even appear religious, devoutly so, but if they transgress God's law about acceptable religion, they are sinners. Whatever the present appeal of those who sin, there is no reason to envy them for, as Romans 6:23 tells us, the wages of sin is death.

But the positive side of Solomon's advice: Live in the fear of God always. What does it mean to fear God? Just what it says, I believe. There is *reason* to fear God. His wrath is awful. Hebrews 10:31 affirms that it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. But here is the key in Proverbs 1:7. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.

My friend, are you are out of the Lord? Or, are you uncertain about where you stand with Him? You had better tremble in fear! But don't just fear. Allow the fear to motivate you to learn about God the Savior and, when you have knowledge of Him, obey it. The Lord said in Matthew 11:29, "Take My yoke upon you, and learn from Me,.." Follow after His ways and keep His commandments, always. In that way, your fear of God becomes a good thing, moving you to eternal salvation in His grace.

Finally, 1 John 4:18 affirms that "perfect love casts out fear," and chapter five, verse three says, "...this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments." My understanding is that fear of God should motivate us to learn about Him and His word. If what we learn constraints us to love God, we will keep His commandments, and fear is driven out because we are safe in His love. Then, there remains no more reason to fear.