

Why So Many Christians Don't Hate What Is Evil

I'll never forget the day when, out of the blue, God said to my heart, "Hate evil!" Somewhat unnerved, I replied, "But Lord, you told us to love our enemies, not to hate" (Matt. 5:44). His reply: "I didn't tell you to hate people, I told you to hate evil!"

What a shocker! I had read the relevant passage many times in Romans 12:9b, "Hate what is evil. Cleave to what is good" –but hadn't understood all that it was saying. (Note that the New American Standard Bible reads, "Abhor what is evil!")

In Romans 7:15, the apostle Paul lamented the fact that he committed the very sins that he hated. He was not saying that he hated himself, but rather, he hated his evil desires/actions. More on that later.

Impure Motivations

Looking at my own approach to the matter, I finally realized that my "hatred" of sin had more to do with:

- my hatred of being under the sway of sin.
- not experiencing victory over it,
- not being perfect,
- suffering the embarrassment of being caught in sin.
- constantly being made the fool by its deceptions.

Now, I understood that my hatred of sin had been a "me-centered" intellectual response to my own failures rather than a genuine hatred of the very thing itself.

Now I saw in Romans 12:9 an exhortation to aggressively hate

the evilness of evil—to vehemently oppose it and to consider it the most horrible of things.

Seeing Things as They Are

If only we could see the reality behind the evil that entices us—for example, a pornographic image. If the veil could be lifted for just a moment, we would see the horrible, demonic force that undergirds the image and the bareness found there. In place of the irresistible enticement, we would see the torture and murder of our Lord that was necessary to atone for our embrace of such an illusion.

God is entreating us to consciously oppose what is evil—to consider it as the vile enemy that it is—an enemy that required Jesus to suffer and die.

Many in the church today only pay attention to the grace side of the equation—that the sins of believers are forgiven—a focus that although true, overlooks the goal that lies beyond salvation, which is an incorporation of Christ’s hatred of evil and His love of what is good.

Unexpected Consequences

My first lesson in this matter was to discern the various kinds of evil that daily presented themselves to me. One day, as a gratuitously violent scene came across the television, the Lord spoke to my heart, saying: “Why do you entertain yourself with violence?” Busted! It had never occurred to me that such a thing was evil.

On another occasion, I was watching a comedian on TV. Some of his jokes were off-color, while others demeaned people. Until then, I had “bravely weathered” the ungodly jokes in order to find gratification in the clean ones. But with God’s exhortation in mind, I now realized the damage that the ungodly jokes were having on my spirit and my pursuit of holiness. I suddenly saw them as part and parcel of the system

of evil that nailed Jesus to the cross.

But the big shocker was that once I decided to change the channel, a host of rationalizations began to flood my mind. A resistance from within cried out against my desire for a deeper pursuit of holiness.

I would miss an otherwise good story.

I would be deprived of the comfort of the good jokes.

The human body is beautiful, so what's wrong with watching that fairly mild sex scene?

After all, I don't watch *Game of Thrones*!

Loving Evil

As I commiserated with the Lord over this unexpected interior resistance, I asked Him, "Why does my soul still resist the good?" His reply: "It's because you still love things that are evil."

"Yes", I thought, "somewhere deep in my heart, I still love these ungodly things. Otherwise they wouldn't be a temptation to me."

Oh, God, give me a hatred of all that is evil and a love of all that is good!

No wonder our Lord repeatedly calls us to make holy choices even after He has justified us before the Father. No wonder, even in an age of grace, the New Testament is replete with exhortations to resist sin and embrace holiness. Sadly, it is our love of evil, though cleverly masked, that prevents the sanctification process from proceeding. Indeed, our calling as believers, which is to be transformed into the image of Christ, continues to be shipwrecked until this is remedied.

Spiritual Warfare

Then I had a “eureka” moment: Hatred of sin is a weapon of our warfare—and it works! It is an act of spiritual warfare that must be grounded in a passionate love for Jesus—one that should be applied to every temptation that comes our way, every day and for the rest of our lives.

We are called to grow into Christ in all things (Col. 1:10-11; 2 Pet. 3:18). We are to be transformed into His image (2 Cor. 3:18). We are to be made like unto Him (Rom. 8:29).

Let’s take our cue from God Himself:

“God hates wickedness” (Ps. 45:7).

“Let those who love the Lord hate evil” (Ps. 97:10).

“I gain understanding from Your precepts; therefore I hate every wrong path” (Ps. 119:104).

“The fear of the Lord is to hate evil” (Prov. 8:13a).

“The righteous hate what is false” (Prov. 13:5a, NIV).

In short, to love evil is to oppose Christ (2 Tim. 2:25-26).

Sin Living Within Us

We have been talking about the principle of “sin living within us” which Paul wrote about in Romans 7. As a believer, he found himself doing the ungodly things he did not want to do and not doing the godly things that he wanted to do. He further explained in 2 Corinthians 1:9, 21a that trials of all sorts happen “that we might not rely on ourselves but on it is God who makes both us and you stand firm in Christ.”

Paul also wrote in Philippians 2:13 that “it is God who works in you both to will and to act according to His good purpose.” But He does not do that work without our firm desire to be made holy and an ongoing and fervent pursuit of Him and His righteousness (1 Tim. 6:11-12; 2 Tim. 2:22).

The solution is further fleshed out in Romans 8 and Galatians 5:16 where Paul speaks of God's "way of escape" (1 Cor. 10:13). First, he rejoices in Jesus' removal of condemnation from the equation. Then he describes how the Holy Spirit will give us victory over the desires of the flesh as we choose to live by His power rather than our own (Rom. 8:6-14). However, if we don't hate evil, then this provision for freedom cannot take place.

Living in Him Is the Answer

It is obvious to anyone who has tried it, that hating evil requires an inner transformation of the will, wrought from a deep love for Christ and appreciation for His astonishing act of love on the cross.

Throughout our day-to-day life, when evil presents itself in pretty packages, it is important that we have already gained a facility for turning to God for His power and a strengthening of our will to resist. As Paul wrote, we need to press on to take hold of the high calling in Christ Jesus and to live up to what we have already obtained (Phil. 3:7-16).

If our hearts have been cleansed and empowered in God's presence (John 15:5) and have learned to hate evil, when we come face to face with evil desires, the power of the Holy Spirit will unite with our now purified desire to make our efforts to resist succeed. When we see temptations (even small ones) as the evil that they are, then and only then will we experience true victory in Christ. {eo}

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