

"The Fear of the Lord is to Hate Evil"

Russ Bowman

A couple of years ago, I decided that I would forego sweets for a while. My objective was not so much "a diet" in the usual sense as I wasn't really looking for weight loss. Nor was my intent to begin a new lifestyle related to "clean eating" or the concern that sugar is some kind of poison. No, my conviction was related to something much more basic. I love sweets. Dark chocolate and cookies and ice cream were practically daily indulgences. Dinner and supper demanded something sweet and rare was the meal that I didn't yield to the demand. And, while my cravings didn't become an abuse, and probably didn't fall within the realm of addiction, they were definitely there and were persuasive. So, as a practice of pure self-discipline, I determined to avoid sweets for a while. I still eat foods with sugar in them but I've worked hard to stay away from desserts or sugary snacks. It's been an interesting undertaking and the exercise of mind over body has been productive. And while I'm at the point where I will occasionally eat a cookie or have some ice cream, I have several times now gone for six months or more without anything of the sort and it has changed my general eating habits. But there has been one very interesting side effect - my tastes have changed. After a couple of weeks "off sugar," other foods began to taste different - better. I could taste more subtle flavors. Moreover, when I did eventually eat something sweet again, it was almost overpowering. Even now - as much as I love a good chocolate chip cookie - anything very sweet borders on too sweet. I find that fascinating - the things that I absolutely love and even crave have lost some of their appeal.

In Prov.8:13, Solomon notes that "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil." I suspect that most folks would argue that they "hate evil" primarily because we associate the word "evil" with the most vile, destructive, abusive, and unthinkable of sins. The evil man is the serial killer/rapist; the Jeffrey Dahmer cannibal; the torturer of ISIS infamy. Rare is the man who sees himself as "evil." Yet Solomon is using the term in simple contrast to the ways of God, to truth, to righteousness. His concepts are simple - "good vs. evil". In that sense, every sinner is evil. That includes all of us. And the concept of "hating evil" is somewhat interesting to me, primarily due to the fact that what is evil or sinful is something that begins with what I like. Jas.1:12f argues that sin is the result of my own undisciplined desire. His argument is not that the presence of the desire is sinful, but that the improper indulgence of the desire is sinful. In practical terms, when I do not properly control what I want (and what I like), then I sin. So, Solomon's proposition is fascinating in that I am supposed to hate that which I like. Just how do you come to despise the very thing that attracts you?

Temperance is the exercise of the will over the desires, and it's amazing just how much our wants are empowered by our acquiescence. The more we give in, the more we want. Perhaps it works that way because the base fulfillment of our desires is unsatisfying - such is the point of Ecclesiastes. But what wisdom decrees in Prov.8 is

essentially the very thing I've learned about sweets. The less I indulge, the more my tastes change and the less I enjoy the sweets. Self-control may eventually prompt us to disdain the very things we think we like, because we change our appetites and desires. We come to desire what is good, wise, profitable, godly because that has been our intentional focus. That which is evil becomes distasteful to us because we have re-trained ourselves. It sounds counter intuitive, yet it makes perfect sense. If I want to "hate evil" then I need to work on my desires and discipline myself so that I don't give in. Eventually I will come to appreciate what is good and godly to the point that I no longer have the same passion for what results in evil. Interesting, huh?