

## Week 5 – Love the Sinner; Hate the Sin – Jude 1:22-23

### Scripture Reading: Jude 1:17-25

#### Introduction

Imagine you are being interviewed and you must give a 30-second answer to the following question without time to reflect on it or to edit your answer and your answer will be broadcast to the world – “Is being gay a sin?”

That was the question that Ellen DeGeneres, who is openly gay, asked Christian singer Lauren Daigle when she appeared on the daytime show *Ellen* back in 2018

Completely caught off guard, Daigle replied, “I can’t honestly answer on that. In a sense, I have too many people that I love that they are homosexual...I can’t say one way or the other. I’m not God.”

Of course to no one’s surprise, that answer didn’t satisfy anyone

Daigle’s conservative Christian fans thought she had wimped out on the opportunity to state a biblical truth and her LGBTQ fans thought her ambiguity was patronizing

So, how do you think you would answer?

Maybe you would say something like gospel singer Kim Burrell did after her appearance on *Ellen* was cancelled when it was discovered that she had previously referred to the “perverted homosexual spirit” during a sermon

When confronted about it Burrell said, “I love you and God loves you. But God hates the sin.”

“Love the sinner but hate the sin” is a popular expression in Christian circles partly because it sounds like a biblical thing to say

Our focus passage seems to teach it as it talks about having mercy on those who doubt and hating even the garment stained by the flesh [**Jude 1:22-23**]

But the expression is also popular in part because it’s a way to express the grace of God without discounting the seriousness of sin - and separating the sin from the person committing the sin makes our judgments seem a little less judgmental

However, like many of the bumper stickers we are considering in this series, the issue with “Love the sinner; hate the sin” isn’t so much that it’s *wrong* as that it’s *misleading*

When we say “love the sinner; hate the sin” we leave people with a wrong impression

Because it’s simplistic shorthand that doesn’t come close to conveying the richness and hopefulness of God’s approach to sin

And, if we want to maintain a dialogue and have the opportunity to lead people to a saving knowledge of Christ, we might be better off abandoning the expression altogether

If you’re taking notes, we will first consider the **problems** with the saying

Then we will be looking at the **reality** of the situation as we find it in Scripture

And, lastly, we will take a look at a **better approach** when dealing with people and their sin

Those are your fill-in-the-blanks for each main heading – problems, reality, and better approach

As we begin, I want to make sure you understand that the saying, “Love the sinner; hate the sin” isn’t exactly a false statement or a wrong sentiment in the way most people use it

But it is overly concise and that causes it to be misleading which means that saying it can lead to all sorts of misunderstandings and miscommunications

So, let’s look now at some of the problems the saying has

## I. The Problems with the Saying

Perhaps the most glaring problem with the saying is that “love the sinner but hate the sin” isn’t deemed to be all that loving to the person who has it said about them

It sounds good and it seems to be virtuous and we mean for it to convey love and serve as an impetus for positive change but it typically winds up sounding a whole lot better to the person saying it than it does to the person it’s directed at

As a young man, Dr. Christopher Yuan was convinced he was gay and when he left home to attend dental school he immersed himself in the gay party scene that ultimately led to a diagnosis with HIV and a prison sentence for dealing drugs

While in prison a book sitting in a garbage can caught his eye so he fished it out and began to read it

It was a Gideon bible and Dr. Yuan was convinced to trust in Christ and turn his life over to God and he has been a professor at Moody Bible Institute for the past 12 years

I mention him because he has great insight when it comes to the saying “love the sinner but hate the sin”

Listen to what he had to say:

“When I was a gay man, this was not my ‘struggle,’ my ‘lifestyle,’ or my ‘choice.’ It was simply *who I was*.”

And when you tell someone you love them but hate their sin he said, “they don’t really feel loved! All they hear is what comes after the ‘but’.”

We readily understand that to be true when we consider the “buts” in our lives

“You did a great job on the project but...”; “I think you’re a really great person but...”

Those “buts” cancel out everything that came before it and once we hear that “but” all our focus is on how we have fallen short

And when you understand that a person like Dr. Yuan actually sees their sin as their identity, you would have to be pretty stubborn to not acknowledge that saying you love them but hate their sin wouldn’t be seen as anything but loving

Imagine telling someone you love them but you hate the color of their skin or their height or the size of their feet or the shape of their head and you can readily understand how off-putting it is to say you love them but hate some part of them

The **second** big problem that arises when we say “I love the sinner but hate the sin” is that it automatically creates a divide between us and the “sinner”

It results in an “us vs. them” mentality where you, the *righteous* person, are looking down on someone you have just labeled a vile “sinner” who needs to get their act together

And whether we mean it in this way or not it appears as if we are saying that their sin is worse than ours

Let’s be honest and admit that we are more prone to use the phrase “love the sinner but hate the sin” when talking about sins that we don’t believe we’re likely to commit

Because we all have our pet sins that we acknowledge God might be a little peeved about but it’s not like we’re a “sinner” on the same plane as this other person

And when our pet sins are pointed out to us we have ready-made excuses such as:

I don’t have a problem with pride; I have a healthy self-esteem

I’m not stubborn; I’m tenacious

I don’t have a problem with anger; I’m passionate about what I believe

And even when we do admit our own sin we do so while reminding everyone that Christians never claimed to be perfect we're just forgiven and God is working with us on it

My point is, saying "I love the sinner but hate the sin" sounds like maximizing their sin while minimizing our own and the implication is that "I'm a good person because I love you in spite of your sin" even if that isn't our intent

The **third** problem with the saying that I want to mention what happens when those who hear it focus on the "hate" part while ignoring the "love" part

The world tends to believe that Christians are nothing but a bunch of hateful, intolerant, judgmental hypocrites anyway - just this past week, I've seen statements online that equate conservative Christians with the Taliban [venndiagram]

The only righteous discrimination these days seems to be discrimination directed at Christians so I'm not so sure that it's really a good approach to confirm their perception of us

Not if our desire is to reach them for Christ

And that should be the desire of every sincere Christ-follower because the task God has given us isn't to get people to conform to a set of rules but to get people to come to a saving knowledge of Christ and become his disciple

To make that clear we need to recognize and embrace the reality of the situation

## **II. The Reality of the Situation**

When we apply the saying "love the sinner but hate the sin" to God we can quickly get into trouble because God's attitude toward sinners and sin is far more complex than the statement suggests

And to say that he loves the sinner but hates the sin paints a picture of who God is and how God loves that isn't biblical

As we read the pages of the Bible it becomes quite clear to us that God hates sin

Look at **Psalm 5:4**

*For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.*

Or **Zechariah 8:17**

*Do not devise evil in your hearts against one another, and love no false oath, for all these things I hate, declares the Lord*

And sin is the antithesis, or complete opposite, of God

**Psalm 97:2** tells us that "*Righteousness and justice are the foundation of his throne*"

And we read that sin always results in God's judgment

For instance in **Romans 6:23** we see that "the wages of sin is death" which means not only the physical death that was ushered into the world when Adam sinned but also spiritual death – complete and total, eternal separation from God

God's attitude toward sin is indisputable – he hates it

And his attitude toward sin should be the attitude of each and every believer

But what is God's attitude toward the sinner?

Is it accurate to imply that God doesn't hate the sinner as our saying seems to do?

Before we jump into finding the answer to those questions, let's take a few moments to make sure we understand the idea of "hate" and "love" as we find them in the Bible

Pastor John Piper put it this way:

"Hate and love both have two meanings each. Hate can be intense loathing of a quality, or hate can be beyond that – the intense intentionality to destroy. Love, similarly, can be an intense delighting in a quality, and it can be an intense intentionality to bless in spite of the presence of some unsavory quality. So in any given text in the Bible, we have to ask:

Is the hatred being spoken of here only an intense loathing of a quality of a person, or is it also the intent to destroy. The same is true with God's love: God's love moves him to save millions of people who, in and of themselves, are loathsome to him."

Let's look at Psalm 5 again but this time at both verses 4 and 5 [**Ps 5:4-5**]

*For you are not a God who delights in wickedness; evil may not dwell with you.*

*The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; **you hate all evildoers.***

Or **Psalm 11:5** which reveals:

*The Lord tests the righteous, but **his soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.***

Also **Proverbs 6:16-19** which lists seven things that God hates

*There are six things that the Lord hates, seven that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that make haste to run to evil, a false witness who breathes out lies, and one who sows discord among brothers.*

Clearly, God does hate sinners which means that God has an intense loathing of someone when they sin – because sin is so utterly detestable to him, the person who is stained by sin is also detestable to him

Sin doesn't exist in a vacuum and there would be no sin unless it was committed by a sinner

And God pours his wrath out on those sinners who remain unrepentant

God doesn't just send sin to hell he sends *sinner*s to hell and it's not sin that suffers in hell but the *sinner*s who committed the sin

Sin, at its base level, is rebellion against God so that those who persist in their sin are enemies of God and God is likewise their enemy

But the paradoxical thing is that while God hates sinners he loves them at the same time

Without God having that divine capability there could be no **John 3:16** that tells us that "*God so loved the world*" that he also hates

Only God can perfectly hate sin *and* sinners while also perfectly loving sinners and desiring their repentance so that he can grant them forgiveness

And here's the thing – that was all of us because every true Christian was once loathsome in God's sight – God's hated enemy

However, he loved us enough, even as he actively hated us in our sin, to come to us with the intent to save us and make us his own so that he might love us forever

Unfortunately, the saying "love the sinner but hate the sin" implies that all a person needs to do is rid themselves of the hated sin so that only love remains

But that isn't the case as the Bible tells us that we must compare ourselves to God's perfection and recognize that we don't come even close to measuring up and that there is nothing we can do for ourselves to make us okay

And then turn to his Son in brokenness and repentance and accept what he did for us on the cross as payment for our sins

In doing so, we gain the right to be called children of God [**John 1:12**]

We are set free from spiritual condemnation [**Romans 8:1**]

We become heirs with Christ [**Romans 8:16-17**] and one spirit with him [**1Corinthians 6:17**]

We are a new creation [**2Corinthians 5:17**] and we are blessed with every spiritual blessing [**Ephesians 1:3**]

Those realities should, in turn, change how we look at everything and especially how we view other people

And that should cause us to want to use a better approach in reaching others

### **III. A Better Approach**

As we have already seen, God clearly hates sin and desires for it to be removed from all people

And it's perfectly acceptable to hate the things that God hates – **Psalm 97:10** tells us it's a sign of loving God

But loving God also involves loving what he loves and if we love God deeply, our love for him should spill over into love for those around us – even those we hate and even those who hate us

And our desire should be what God desires

So when we read in **2Peter 3:9** that God doesn't want anyone to perish [spiritually] but that all should reach repentance we should be looking for how we might facilitate making that happen

Saying "love the sinner; hate the sin" is a shorthand way of communicating truths that are found in the Bible but it also opens us up to the problems we looked at earlier

And those problems tend to close people off from us and deprive us of the opportunity to meaningfully engage them

When Jesus was on the earth he communicated in two major ways: he told engaging stories and he asked great questions

In all, the gospel accounts record Jesus asking 339 questions and he did so, most often, to engage with people by facilitating conversation in order to build relationships and to cause people to have to think

Consider the account from Luke 10 when the lawyer asked Jesus about how to earn eternal life and rather than simply answering his question, Jesus asked two questions of his own

**[Luke 10:26]** *"What is written in the Law? How do you read it?"*

Of course, Jesus already knew the answer so his questions so we can deduce that he wanted the lawyer to think through the issue with him and Jesus went on to use it as a teaching moment

In the gospel of Matthew, Jesus asked possibly the most open-ended and intriguing question of all on four different occasions – "What do you think?"

The application for us is that asking questions is a powerful way to engage someone – and especially when you are being challenged

For example, if you face the question we considered at the beginning of this sermon, "Is being gay a sin?" you could ask, "How do you define sin?" or "What does it mean to be gay?"

And if they ask whether gay people are going to hell you might ask in return who they think deserves God's judgment or what criteria merits God's judgment or who they think merit being condemned to hell

Questions help clarify the issue and serve to define terms and, sometimes, uncover motives

But, more importantly, questions provide an open door for dialogue about the issue raised

And the answers you receive should lead to a more productive conversation than merely answering with a bumper sticker slogan could ever do

This approach doesn't mean we should be wishy-washy about the truth and we are often going to be called upon to take a stand and say what people often don't want to hear

As Chuck Colson wrote in one of his books:

*"Orthodoxy often requires us to be hard precisely where the world is soft and soft where the world is hard...In every way that matters, Christianity is an affront to the world; it is countercultural."*

But even when we have to tell people what we know they don't want to hear we need to do so with the knowledge of our own sinfulness and the grace that we have received from Jesus

Because there is no way we can justly have an attitude of superiority when we keep in mind that, while we may not have engaged in the same sin as the person we're facing, we were destined for the fires of hell until God rescued us

## **Conclusion**

As I said at the beginning, the bumper sticker slogan "Love the sinner; hate the sin" isn't a false statement but it can be a misleading one and using it can erect barriers that we then have to struggle to overcome

God's offer of redemption and reconciliation through Christ extends to everyone – even to you and me – and we need to share that good news with everyone we can

So let's endeavor to build relationships with those we might have labeled "sinners" and endeavor to get to know them so that we might earn the right to speak the truth to them in genuine love and lead them to the cross

God has called us to make disciples not build barriers

Let's pray

**Jude 1:17-25 (page 1027)**

But you must remember, beloved, the predictions of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ. They said to you, "In the last time there will be scoffers, following their own ungodly passions." It is these who cause divisions, worldly people, devoid of the Spirit. But you, beloved, building yourselves up in your most holy faith and praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. And have mercy on those who doubt; save others by snatching them out of the fire; to others show mercy with fear, hating even the garment stained by the flesh.

Now to him who is able to keep you from stumbling and to present you blameless before the presence of his glory with great joy, to the only God, our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion, and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.