**Title: I Want To Hear A Sermon About “Love The Sinner Hate the Sin.”**

This is our last Sunday for this “I want to hear a sermon about…” series. And honestly I’m glad it’s come to an end because you’ve asked me to talk about some hard things- and today’s is no exception. One of you wrote: **I want to hear a sermon about… “Love The Sinner, Hate the Sin.”**

Let’s start with a pop quiz, shall we? It’s multiple choice. Where does the phrase **“Love the sinner, hate the sin”** come from? [SLIDES]

A.The Dr. Seuss Classic: Green Eggs and Sin B.Revelation 23 C.A letter from Saint Augustine to some naughty nuns.

D.The InterVarsity Press PR Dept. E.II Hezekiah

**And the answer is:** **C.** A letter from Saint Augustine to some naughty nuns.

Augustine was the Bishop of Hippo [in modern-day Algeria]. As such he oversaw the monastery of Hippo. His own sister had been prioress there some time before. A new prioress had taken the job and the nuns were in a bit of a rebellious attitude. He offers correction to them on quarreling, complaining about their clothes, meal portions, public behavior and most importantly **“wanton looks.”** In this Augustine isn’t being hard on the Nuns. He’s talking about something he understands quite well.

Before his conversion he was well acquainted with **“wanton looks”** and just about everything else **“wanton”**

you can imagine: lots of women, lots of drinking and partying and all sorts of self-indulgent behavior. He was converted to Christ when he was moved to “take and read” the Bible. He flipped it open and read the first thing he saw: *Not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual excess and lust, not in quarreling and jealousy. Rather, put on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make no provision for the desires of the flesh.* --Romans 13: 13-14

So “Auggie” knows, first hand, the damage “wanton” behavior can have on heart and mind. He gives the nuns some rules for discipline in this area and then says [SLIDE]: For this is not done cruelly but mercifully, to protect very many from perishing through infection of the plague with which one has been stricken. Moreover, what I have now said in regard to abstaining from wanton looks should be carefully observed, **with due** [**love**](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/09397a.htm) **for the** [**persons**](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/11726a.htm) **and** [**hatred**](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/07149b.htm) **of the** [**sin**](http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/14004b.htm)**,…** And there it is: …*with love for the persons and hatred of the sin.*

How it grew from a “throwaway line” in a letter to some nuns to nigh Biblical proportions is a mystery, but we find the phrase all over the place. In 1729, the hymnist [Isaac Watts](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Isaac_Watts) wrote in [an essay](http://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=uc1.31175007436036;view=1up;seq=256), "[Jesus] hated even the least sin, but loved and saved the greatest of sinners." In 1784, [William Mason](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/William_Mason_%28religious_writer%29) wrote in a commentary on *The Pilgrim's Progress*, "[God] can love the sinner, as much as he loaths his sin." And the 1779 Charles Wesley hymn *Equip Me for the War* says, "O may I learn the art / With meekness to reprove; / To hate the sin with all my heart, / But still the sinner love." [Gandhi referenced it](https://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Mahatma_Gandhi#An_Autobiography_.281927.29) in his 1927 autobiography: "'Hate the sin and not the sinner' is a precept which, though easy enough to understand, is rarely practiced…

Today the phrase has become a pretty popular **target** ‘round the internet -mostly in the context of Evangelical’s response to the GLBT community.

Google: “Love the sinner, Hate the sin” and you will get hundreds of articles, blog posts, rants about and apologies for the phrase. [I know. I’ve read them.]

**A couple samples:** Micah J. Murray made a lot of waves with *“ Why I Can’t Say Love the Sinner/Hate the Sin Anymore”* He writes: I'm done. I can't look my gay brother in the eye anymore and say "I love the sinner but hate the sin." I can't keep drawing circles in the sand. I thought I just needed to try harder. Maybe I needed to focus more on loving the sinner, and less on protesting the sin. But even if I was able to fully live up to that "ideal," I'd still be wrong. I'd still be viewing him as something other, something different. Not human. Not friend. Not Christian. Not brother. Sinner.

It's a special sort of condescending love we've reserved for the gay community. We'll agree to love them, accept them, welcome them -- but we reserve the right to see them as different. We reserve the right to say "them" instead of "us." We embrace them with arms full of disclaimers about how all the sinners are welcome here. And yet, they're the only ones we constantly remind of their status as sinners, *welcome sinners.* …

On the other side of the divide is this article from *Relevant Magazine* by Suzanne Munganga We are becoming more and more interested in the idea of acceptance. For the most part, this is a great thing. …But, as with many cultural shifts, there is a balance to keep in mind. In our efforts to “love the sinner, hate the sin,” we often find it easier to ignore the sin altogether, and confuse blind acceptance with genuine love. She says today’s understanding of “acceptance” is really just *superficiality* leaving us with surface level relationships. She writes:

"Love the sinner, hate the sin" has meant different things to different generations. Sometimes, it’s been used as an excuse to essentially ostracize people we view as “sinners” from the Church. But I often see our generation leaning too far the other direction: most of us take the phrase to mean, "Accept the sinner and their sinful behaviors, and just secretly hate the sin."

The truth is, **love and acceptance are not the same thing.** The even bigger truth is that love is messy and hard, while acceptance is clean and easy. Love says, "Your actions are hurting you. And because I love you, I am going to hold you accountable."

… Christian love says, "I love you for the broken, sinful person that you are. And because I love you, I will encourage you to be the man or woman you are called to be in Christ."  Don't just take the easy way out by condoning the continuation of sin, but rather, speak the truth in love and see real change and growth happen.

The statement supporters generally say: both parts of the statement are easily supported from scripture-OT & NT, if you think this is impossible, you’re doing it wrong, and “Love the sinner, hate the sin is what God in Christ does. For God so loved the world… While we were still sinners Christ died for us…

Those dismissing the statement basically say it’s not biblical, emphasize lots of “judge not” passages and they are adamant that it’s impossible for the average Christian to separate the act from the person so inevitably *the Love is omitted and all we do is hate*. **Let’s consider the pieces:** [SLIDE]:

[SLIDE]: **1st:** “SINNERS” IS ALL OF US. Some of us have admitted that we’re sinners and we need to be rescued from our self-centered selves and we *stepped into the circle of Jesus’ authority.* This choice marks us as “SAVED.” Jesus has atoned for our sin- that is Jesus has made us “at one” w/ God.

BUT, while “saved” we still sin because we are still partially fallen, broken. We are “working out our salvation in fear and trembling” but we still do things that God would name as SIN. Yes, we sin but we seek not to and we are “…confident of this, that He who began a good work in [us] will carry it on to completion until the Day of Christ Jesus.”

We are God’s but we are not GOOD. Not yet.

**James 4:17** Therefore,to one who knows *the* right thing to do and does not do it, to him it is sin.

**1John 1:** **8** If we say that we have no sin, we are deceiving ourselves and the truth is not in us.

**Is. 64:6**    All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away.

You are the sinner. I am the sinner. Every human, redeemed or not, is the sinner in the phrase:

**“Love The Sinner, Hate the Sin.”** This is not about “them” this is about “us”-all of us. It is about the humility in a prayer that I pray personally all the time: Lord Jesus Christ, Son of the Living God, have mercy on me a sinner.

Redeemed Church-goer though you may be, you are superior to no one, better than no one, more righteous than none. To embrace this phrase you and I must put our “high horse” out to pasture. We must think on Jesus’ story of the **Pharisee and the tax man** who both went up to pray. **11** “The Pharisee stood and was praying this to himself: ‘God, I thank You that I am not like other people: swindlers, unjust, adulterers, or even like this tax collector. **Luke 18:13** “But the tax collector stood at a distance. He would not even look up to heaven, but beat his breast and said, ‘God, have mercy on me, a sinner.’ **Luke 18:14** “I tell you that this man, rather than the other, went home justified before God. To utter “Love the Sinner, Hate the sin” with any integrity you and I need to be the tax man.

[SLIDE]: **2nd:** LET’S REMEMBER WHAT SIN ACTUALLY IS. What do Yosemite Sam, Ralph Kramden, and Joe Peschi’s character Tommy in *Goodfellas* have in common: a temper with a hair trigger. And something always sets it off. **Sin is NOT “the thing” that sets off God’s temper**, the thing that annoys the almighty or ticks off the Trinity. *God is not shocked, offended or affronted by your sin.* You’re not that powerful.

**But you are that LOVED:** loved like a daughter or son. And God, like any good father has marvelous hopes and dreams for you. *Sin is us “falling short” of God’s hopes and dreams for us.* The Greek word for sin- hamartia- means “missing the mark” God has told us to shoot for. *Death corrupts our aim.*

Where sin is, death is established because sin & death are inseparable. And where death is established it grows faster than Himalayan Black berries in a Pacific Northwest empty lot. And death [via sin] is always felt as separation.

Remember Jesus on the cross- bearing the sin [thus the death] of the entire world on his perfect person- crying out: My God, My God, why have you left me?

Jesus is experiencing the separation that comes from sin & death. Isaiah explained it to us a few centuries before: **Is. 59:2** But youriniquities have made a separation between you and your God, And your sins have hidden *His*  face from you so that He does not hear. [God never leaves.] Sin creates separation between us and God.

Sin also brings destruction and loss to your life in describing this the Bible writers portray sin as untended wounds and open sores [Is 1:6], a smothering, crushing burden [[Ps 38:4](http://biblia.com/bible/esv/Ps%2038.4)], defiling grimy muck [2Cor 7:1] a debt demanding payment [Matt 6:12], pitch darkness [1Jn 1:6] a red uncleansable stain- like merlot spilled on a new white carpet [Is 1:18].

Sin brings separation and God does not want to be separated from you.

Sin brings destruction and hurt to your life and God does not want you to be hurt or destroyed.**Does God get angry over his children’s sin? Yeah He does.**

And being a Father myself I get it.

After hearing too many stories about kids finding parents guns and playing with them and killing their friends or siblings I set out a rule for our kids. If they were at a friends house and a kid brings out a gun you get up and you leave. Don’t explain just get out. If I had ever heard that a gun had come out and they stayed and played around. I would have been angry: angry that they didn’t do what I said BECAUSE their disobedience might have resulted in them being grieviously injured or me losing them to the separation of death.

God doesn’t want that for you either. Again God is not affronted or offended or grossed out by your sin. *God despises sin because of its potential to damage us and separate us from Him.* To utter “Love the sinner, hate the sin” with integrity we need to think of SIN as the thing that damages God’s children and separates them from their loving Father.

[SLIDE]: **3rd:** HATE MAY NOT MEAN WHAT **WE** THINK IT MEANS There’s no doubt from scripture that God “hates” sin: **Ps 5:4** For you are not a God who is pleased with wickedness;

**Prov. 6:16**  There are six things which the LORD hates, Yes, seven which are an abomination to Him: **17** Haughty eyes, a lying tongue, And hands that shed innocent blood, **18** A heart that devises wicked plans, Feet that run rapidly to evil, **19** Afalse witness *who* utters lies, And one whospreads strife among brothers. Paul instructs US: “Hate what is evil; cling to what is good” [12:9].

*Shockingly God even seems to hate some people:* **Psa. 5:5** Theboastful shall not stand before Your eyes; You hate all who do iniquity. **6** You destroy those who speak falsehood; The LORD abhors the man of bloodshed and deceit.

Hate is a strong word for us, culturally. For us “hate” is a thing of seething passion and commitment. Hate for us is to be aggressively and unchangeably dedicated to the detestation if not the destruction of the thing, idea or people hated. This colors how we hear “Hate the sin.” *But in Semitic culture hyperbole [exaggeration] is a common means of expression.* **In Malachi** God says: “Jacob I loved. Esau I hated.” This doesn’t mean God passionately gut-wrenchingly detests Esau. It’s linguistic hyperbole to make the point that God chose Jacob for a particular purpose over Esau. [Esau is ultimately greatly blessed and reunited with Jacob.]

In the story of Jacob and Leah and Rachel [Gen29], Rachel is loved and Leah is “loved less.” This is hyperbolized into “when the Lord saw that Leah was hated…” [Gen 29]. Loved less, not hated as we see hate.

Jesus tells us **Luke 14:26** “If anyone comes to Me, and does not **hate** his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple. This, too, is Semitic hyperbole meaning no more than: all human relationships must take a back seat to being a disciple of Jesus.

**And while God “hates” sin** –because of the separation and destruction it brings to his creation- he loved every one of his image-bearing humans so much that while we were sinners Jesus of Nazareth, God in the flesh, sacrificed himself for us to put us right with God.

This is consistent with his character: in Hosea 9 God says about the Northern Kingdom: **Hos. 9:15**   All their evil is atGilgal; Indeed, I came to hate them there! But when we get to Hos11God says: **Hos. 11:8**   How can I give you up, O Ephraim? … All My compassions are kindled. 9 …ForI am God and not man, … And then God speaks of bringing his trembling people back saying: 11 …And I will settle them in their houses, declares the LORD. **“I am God, not man…” God’s hatred is NOT like ours. And his compassion is not like ours.**

To utter “Love the sinner, hate the sin” with integrity we need to remember that truth.

 [SLIDE]: 4th: LOVE IS FIRST AND FOREMOST You know this. Jesus says the most important command is: **Matt 22:37** “‘ *You shall love the Lord you God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’* 38 “This is the great and foremost commandment. 39 “The second is like it, ‘ *You shall love your neighbor as yourself.****’***

**John 13:34**    “A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.

**Matt. 5:44** But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you,

**Rom. 12:10** Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves.

**1Cor. 16:14** Let all that you do be done in **love**. **Heb. 13:1**   Let **love** of the brethren continue.

**John 14:15**   “If you **love** Me, you will keep My commandments.

In the phrase “Love the sinner, hate the sin” Love is the key. It’s the driving force. Sin CANNOT stop agape- the love that loves “no matter what.” If “hating the sin” is making you arrogant or pharisaical then you’re doing it wrong. If “hating the sin” is keeping you from unqualified, self-sacrificing, considering-others-better-than-yourself AGAPE-LOVE- then you’re doing it wrong.

Your human perspective is obscuring God’s perspective.

We should “hate the sin” the way a mother who’s lost a daughter to a drunk driver hates **alcohol.**

We should “hate the sin” the way a father whose son is being destroyed by Meth hates **drugs.**

Every parent and grandparent in this room KNOWS that “Loving the sinner and hating the sin” is NOT impossible. We’ve all had [or are having] instances where our kids did things that we “hated” because it could’ve killed or damaged them- but our love for them NEVER stops. We keep wanting the best for them. We do not “hate” their “sin” from a sense of revenge, or embarrassment, or superiority or prejudice. We hate our children’s “sins” because of loving concern for what “sin” does to them body and soul. That’s doing it right. To utter “Love the sinner, hate the sin” with integrity, Agape- Love must be its driving force.

 **Let’s wrap this up** [SLIDE]**:**

“The phrase “Love the sinner, hate the sin” is unquestionably supported by many scripture texts. It is precisely the way God relates to us, his image-bearing humans: Loving sinners but hating sin so much that he did something about it at the cross. ALL OF US ARE Sinners. All sinners are loved by God without reserve. Our SIN is not shocking or grotesque to God.

God’s hate is not like ours- Thank God. And his Love is not like ours- Thank God.

“Love the sinner hate the sin” has certainly been misused and overused in the last few years. I think, as a part of our internal life it can be an excellent shorthand for how to live, not unlike being “in the world but not of the world,” *Perhaps our mistake has been in using it as a proclamation rather than a meditation.* I don’t think St. Augustine ever intended this saying to be heard beyond the walls of the monastery of Hippo.

**“Love the sinner Hate the sin”** is not a platitude to be announced or crocheted on a pillow or painted on your wall or bumper stickered to your car. I believe it is most powerful as a simple reminder- essentially a silent prayer- that God would help us remember that *the true identity of the sinner is not in the sin but in the fact that they are the Beloved of God.*

Because God hates the sin that separates and destroys.

But God sees the sinner as His Beloved.