

Love the Sinner and Hate the Sin- Half Truth

- I. This morning I am going to show you several slides. Show your approval or like by cheering or clapping and your disapproval or dislike by booing. (Slides) A more serious turn (*after Atlanta Falcons*) How about what has been considered the *Seven Deadly Sins* by Christians through the ages? How do we feel about that? Maybe we are getting too close to home? Here is a truth that I have discovered along the way. **The sins us Christians like to harp on are those we don't wrestle with ourselves.** I don't mind a conversation at all about a people who are lazy or (the more theological term is slothful) but please don't talk to me about my envy of another pastor. I rather talk about *those* people rather than *this* person. That's no fun at all. And here is the church approved way we can do this. By always ending the conversation with "well, love the sinner and hate the sin." I can't tell you how many times I have heard over the years something like this "Did you see that gay couple and how they were holding hands in public. Can you believe it? Well, love the sinner and hate the sin I guess." Let's be honest, I think this phrase is most often used in referring to homosexuality. Growing in some churches I was a part of always sounded to me like they meant the opposite. Like we were to hate the sinner but love the sin...as in love talking about it. Because it wasn't one we were struggling with...at least openly. But is this love the sinner and hate the sin even in the bible? Sounds biblical right? God loves sinners because He loves Megan my wife. 😊 And me...a much bigger sinner. And we really shouldn't embrace the dark side aka sin right? Both these statements are true but as Hamilton points out but there are what I would call fatal flaws to this half-truth.
- II. But before we go on, let's see where this "love the sinner and hate the sin" originates. Surprisingly not from Jesus. Scholars believe it's from two sources. First is an early church father or highly respected leader St. Augustine. He was writing to some nuns who were struggling with upholding their vows. Keeping their habits on. He wrote "have a love of mankind and a hatred of sins." Note he is encouraging a love of people not for the "sinner." An important distinction we will get back to in a moment. But most likely the statement came not from a Christian but a Hindu who had great respect for Jesus' teachings. Gandhi, the great Indian leader who practiced and taught non-violence. He wrote in his autobiography "to hate the sin, not the sinner." Which he goes on to say is easily understood but rarely lived out in this world. Tru Dat! In short, our half-truth doesn't come from the bible but it's a derivative or an off shoot of two different quotes. But we might say "well Ron, so what if isn't not straight from Scripture if it still communicates a truth about how God and how he wants us to live in this world?"
- III. Let's break it down...as in the statement. "Love the sinner" first. Since we are coming up on Valentine's Day the celebration of love (Hint hint men...got to help a brother out) We can get very confused by this word because it has several meanings. For example, I can say I love Cheerwine in one breath and the next I can say I love my daughter. Hopefully I mean two different things. For one I might drive an extra mile to Harris Teeter and the other I would be willing to step in front of a bus. I will let you guess which. Do you want to know what biblical love is? Do you want me to

show you? Do you want to feel what love is... Sorry, I started channeling the 80s's group Foreigner. I would define **biblical love as action orientated compassion directed towards a person or people group**. To borrow a title from writer Bob Goff "Love Does" no matter how we might feel. Tip for us husbands. Fact. We become more attractive to our wives when we love them with this biblical love. For example, let's say you get home after a long day in the office and all you feel like doing is to sit on your couch and veg. But what if instead without asking you walk over and take out the trash and put the dishes away. I promise you might not look so good to your wife sitting on that sofa staring at your 5K 58 inches T.V. but you are going to look like Matthew McConaughey if you are in the kitchen getting it done. This I almost promise you can lead to romantic love. That is all I am going to say about that. So should we love the sinner? Do kind things for these folks even when we don't feel like it? Of course! That is tots biblical. So far then we are on safe ground with love the sinner. But a quick word about sin.

IV. Sin is not just doing a bad thing like telling a fib or cheating on a test. Or eating a high caloric dessert like "Sinfully delicious chocolate cake." The term used in the New Testament was borrowed from the world of archery. **Sin** means to "**miss the mark.**" Like miss the bulls eye. (**image**) Our goal in the Christian life is live like Jesus. Do the things Jesus would want us to do. So whenever we miss the mark, we sin. Holding onto hate, seeking revenge, putting someone else down so we look better are all ways we miss the mark. But it also means things we should do and don't. Like the other day I was working out of the home office when I got a knock on the door. I was right in the middle of doing three things at once and was on a tight schedule. I was hoping the knocker would just go away. But they didn't. I thought well maybe it's the bug guy asking if he could spray our garage? We get some spiders in there that dwarf the size of my head. So I went and opened it and there was my neighbor. I confess, I thought " dang this might take a while". Terrible I know. She is the sweetest person on the earth and just lost her husband. I distinctly remember telling her "if there is anything I can do to help let me know" and there she was letting me know. She told me her friend's car died and asked if I would look at it. Okay so she doesn't know me too well right? Mechanic I am not. I inwardly groaned and thought, "how long will this take? I have a deadline and meetings. I don't have time for this." Had I said "I am sorry I would love to help but maybe next time and slammed the door in her face that would have been a sin. I would have missed the mark, not do something I should have done. But since she is my neighbor and more importantly knows I am pastor and most importantly that this would be a good illustration one day in a sermon 😊 I did the right thing. But I don't always. And if we were honest, no one does. We all miss the mark.

V. That brings us back to the first part of our half-truth. "Love the sinner" So with our biblical definitions in hand it is saying we should actively work for the good of those who miss the mark....which is well everyone. Well, that sounds awfully biblical, right? So what is the problem? Jesus never commands us to do that. Instead in **Mark 12:31 NIV** So what is the difference? If we are all sinners it is the same thing right? Or is it? **Mark 2:13-17 NIV** Did you notice in this passage there are three groups of people? First the sinners. At that time they understood "sinners" as Jews who

were only nominally religious, the Easter and Christmas kind of church folk today. But it also included folks like prostitutes and Patriot fans 😊. Then you had the Pharisees were the very religious Jews. They would be the like church people who are always at church every time the doors are open. The very name Pharisee is from a Hebrew word “to separate.” Like they separated themselves from the sinners. Then you have the final group, which Levi aka Matthew the writer of the first gospel is part. The “tax collectors.” So why all the hate with these guys? Well let me state the obvious, they are tax collectors. But don’t think of IRS agents with suits and ties that do audits. These guys were often brutes. They found an ancient manuscript documenting cases where some tax collectors would beat up old ladies to find out where their tax evading relatives were hiding. This is why these grandma beating and thieving guys were placed in their own category the very bottom of the sin totem pole. And its these guys and the sinners that Jesus decides to dine with not the “good” religious folk. It might be like one of us inviting a friend over for dinner only to find out instead they went supped at the local prison. The Pharisees were not happy. So they call Jesus on it. And Jesus responds with this typical Jesus like remark which at the surface seems simple but in truth its profound. I can see the Pharisees saying to themselves “Dang straight! He should go after those spiritually sick sinners. “ Not realizing they were missing Jesus’ deeper point. We all are missing the mark aka sinners but He was only going to pursue those people who knew and admitted it. He wasn’t going to waste this time with those who didn’t. The so called *righteous*.

VI. **We see in Jesus’ mindset there is not a “them vs. us” there is just us...we are all in the same boat whether *we realize it or not*.** The Pharisees didn’t so Jesus had no spiritual antidote to offer them. You can’t help a sick person if they don’t know they are sick, right? I am not sure about you but I don’t make an appointment with my doctor when I am feeling healthy. “Hey doc, I just feel great and thought you should know it.” You see as soon as we begin to categorize people, giving them labels such as “sinners” and such watch out. We are setting up ourselves as Pharisees thinking of ourselves too highly and everyone else too low. Let me give you a secret to Jesus teaching. If we can get our mind around this we will get to the heart of the gospel. Our inclination as broken people is to read the bible like the Ten Commands or any of the moral commands and to put our judge robes on. And began doing of course what judges do make judgements. We start putting people on trial around us and placing them in categories. John, liar. Sally, promiscuous, Fred greedy, Ron long winded and so forth. But this is what Jesus teaches us. To take off the robes. Put down the gavel. And pick up a mirror instead. Stop judging and looking down on everyone else and begin looking at the gal or guy looking back at you. Be concerned with how we are missing the mark, not our co-workers, friends or “those people” whoever those people may be. I cannot believe I am going to do this but to quote Michael Jackson “start with the man (or woman) in the mirror and change his or her ways.” Do this instead of trying to worry and change everyone else’s. That is straight Jesus. 100 percent.

VII. Just to drill this home, let’s look at one more passage. Due to time I am going to break my own rule and jump right in without looking at the context. I will ask you

to do that at home with your new study bible, right? Jesus says in **Matthew 7:1-5 NIV**. Okay this is not a log but a 2x4 but it represents what Jesus was really talking about a house beam that could have been hundreds of pounds. Well that would have been slightly more difficult to get in here so I am going with 2x4. But think about the image Jesus is offering us. Imagine if I walked up to you and this sticking out of my eye with some tweezers and said “hold still ___” let me get that eye lash out. This shouldn’t hurt a bit.” No you would be like “get away from me you numb skull! I prefer the eye lash than you yanking out my eye ball!” Now Jesus’ audience would have laughed at the absurdity of the image. But he got his point across. **Stop trying to remove or deal with the sins of those around us and deal with our own instead.** Again, look in mirror.

- VIII. So here is what I am saying why the first half of the half-truth is not right. **Jesus doesn’t want us to see people around us as “sinners”** even though they are just like we are **but see people as our neighbors**. If he commanded us to love the sinner, He knew would begin categorizing people just like the Pharisees and be likely to put on our judge robe and break out our gavel. And that is un Jesus like. But how about the second part? “Hate the sin?” That’s okay, right? Paul the early church leader and church planter tells us in his letter to the church in Rome to... **Romans 12:9 NIV**. That is the same thing as hating sin isn’t? Here is what I think is an important distinction. Evil is associated with the demonic or Satan. Sin is associated with broken humanity. I was surprised as much as anyone when I discovered that the bible never tells us to hate sin. Why? I think because our tendency will be to hate the doer of the sin, the sinner. But it does tell us to detest all evil because it’s of the Devil. Yes, humans can do evil or act in demonic type ways. But the Devil can’t sin or miss the mark because He is not even attempting to hit the target. But quite the opposite. I am not saying that we should embrace sin and we should reject it of course, but do so with humility and making a clear distinction between the actions and the actor...the sin and the sinner. Because in the end the sinner is just like you and me, a broken human being needing God’s grace and forgiveness.
- IX. Let me give you a real-world example how this can play out. Several months ago, Julie who is part of our community here sent me an article about women working in the adult “entertainment” ministry. Most were strippers and “exotic” dancers. When interviewed, these women shared about how local churches would send them hate mail. Threatening them with hellfire and what not. I am sure these good church people thought they were doing God’s work and probably somewhere along the way used the “Love the sinner and hate the sin” line that devolved into hating the sin and sinner. A few women Jesus followers heard about this and they wanted it actually love their neighbors even if they didn’t agree with their behavior. So they began dropping off cookies to the dancers in these clubs and small gifts. Soon they got permission to meet these ladies and get to know them as personally. By doing so for these Christian women who were really living out Jesus’ teaching the pronoun they used for the strippers changed from a “them” to an “us.” They began to realize they were the same. Broken humans needed God’s grace and forgiveness. That is doing it Jesus style.

- X. In the end the fatal flaw of the half-truth “love the sinner and hate the sin” is that it encourages us to put on the judge’s robe. Honestly like this one, it just doesn’t fit. Hear this Jesus’ truth, there is only One who can pull this look off...and it is not the man or woman or teenager or child in the mirror. There is only one divine judge who has the right to condemn or set free and that is not you or me. So how about we stop with the very first word in this half-truth so we can transform it into the full biblical truth. Ready for it? Love. That’s all folks. Just love. With a biblical love. And worry only about our sin, the way we miss the mark, not with our neighbors, co-workers, or the people on T.V. Just imagine how different the world would be if every Christian lived this full truth out?

Challenge- talk about Julie's ministry