

# "Hating the Sin and Loving the Sinner"?

This concept is often taught. Yet it is, at best, a *half* truth. Scripture does tell us that God loves even his enemies - Matthew 5:43-48. But it also tells us that he hates those who do wrong - Psalm 5:5. Both statements are true; they *complement*, rather than *contradict* each other.

Many people have a perverse concept of "love for enemies," which closes its eyes to sin and refuses to deal with evil. To love our enemy does *not* mean that we let him get away with sin, when it is within our power to restrain him. We must *not* respond in a way that encourages and reinforces his sin.

Love for enemies means that we don't pay back evil for evil, but we continue to do what is good. We do not desire to sin against them - for doing so makes us just like them. Instead, we desire good to happen to them, expressions of kindness - and this is *not* the same as the encouraging and rewarding of sin. We desire their repentance, salvation, and the resulting changes in lifestyle, for these would cause them to abandon their love for their sin.

We must oppose sin, but we must also oppose the sinner. We cannot encourage him to sin, or we ourselves will be guilty of sin. We must not reward him for sinning, but we must do what we can to promote the proper consequences of justice and restraint. (This may require actions by the civil government - *there are issues in which we are not to take matters into our own hands.*)

Those who are in positions of authority must punish and discipline the *sinner* - they don't just punish the *sin*! A failure to do this, thus allowing a person to continue in sin, is an expression of *hate* - both for the one who is sinning and for the one who is being sinned against! In contrast, a willingness to discipline is, if done in accordance with the Scriptures, an expression of love.

When discipline is coupled with a love for the sinner (a love that God requires), it will also be accompanied by sadness over the fact that the discipline is necessary. Even when the sin committed is so great that death is the punishment required by Scripture, sorrow over the *need* to discipline can (and *should*) be present. After all, even God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked - though Scripture is full of instances in which he required death as the consequence for sin.

Forgiveness and mercy do not mean a denial of justice. *Someone* has to pay, in one sense or another - whether it is the person who committed the sin, or someone else. When Jesus died on the cross, he didn't *ignore* justice; he *fulfilled* justice. On the coming Day of Justice, the only reason there will be some people who *won't* have to pay for their sins is because Jesus took their punishment upon himself. *He* paid for their sins, instead.)

One last thing we need to remember is this: There is a distinction between the consequences we may have to experience in *this present life*, and those we may have to experience in *eternity*. We may be forgiven in eternity (because of what Jesus did), yet still have to suffer the consequences of sins in this present life. A condemned criminal can become a follower of Jesus, but this does not mean he will be automatically released from prison. Even when we consider "natural" consequences of sins, such as disease or injury (when they are caused by sin), a person doesn't become instantly healed, simply because of the fact that he has become a Christian.