

Should We Oppose Evil?

A common expression says that we should “hate the sin, but love the sinner.” Ecclesiastes 3:8 declares that there is “*A time to love and a time to hate.*” Many people think the Bible advocates loving everything and never hating anything. If Christians speak against any form of sin, some people seem to think this is a violation of the Bible teaching about love. They may say, “God is too loving to send people to hell” or “Preaching against sin will drive people away. What you need is more of the love of Christ.”

But the Bible teaches there is “a time to hate” Hatred is not always contrary to the Bible. In fact there are things we are commanded to hate, and some things are sinful to love (1 Timothy 6:10). So what do we love and what do we hate? There are three points we will consider.

First, we should love all people, including sinners and enemies. “Love” refers to concern for the well-being of others. We should not want to harm or destroy them, but see them receive what is best for them. With this in mind, let us consider all whom we should love. We should love our families (Ephesians 5:25-29; Titus 2:4; 1 John 3:11-12). We should love other Christians (John 13:34-35; 2 Corinthians 12:20; 1 Thessalonians 3:12). We should love our neighbors (Matthew 22:36-39; Luke 10:25-27). We should love people of other races and social classes (Luke 10:25-37; John 4:9; Acts 10:24-25, 28). Finally, we should love even sinners and enemies (Luke 6:27-28, 31-33; 23:34; Romans 5:6-9).

So “love the sinner” is a valid Bible principle, but it does not mean, as some believe, that we must approve their sinful conduct. It means we do not want to destroy them or harm them, but we want them to receive what is best. We want them especially to repent and be saved (Luke 13:3, 5; Acts 2:38; 17:30-31).

Second, we should also hate and oppose all sin. We do not seek the destruction of the sinner, but we do seek the destruction and elimination of all sin. God hates evil but loves righteousness (Proverbs 6:16-19; 11:20; 15:9; Hebrews 1:9). The idea that God loves everything, so we should love everything, is simply false. It is extremely dangerous because it leads people to think God will ignore sin, so people can continue to sin without suffering eternal consequences. Furthermore, love for God requires us to hate evil (Deuteronomy 7:25-27; Psalm 97:10; Proverbs 8:13; Matthew 6:24; 1 John 2:15-17). So the issue is not whether we love or hate, but what we love and what we hate. Because of the things we love, there are things we must hate. It is impossible to love everything, because some things are direct op-

posites. If you love one, you must hate its opposite. The more you love one, the more you hate its opposite. The more you love God, the more you hate evil, because God and evil are opposites. The less you hate evil, the less you love God. When your hatred and opposition to evil grows weak, you need to realize that this is because your love for God has grown weak!

Love for truth and righteousness also requires us to hate evil (Psalm 36:1-4, 119:104, 127-128, 163; Romans 12:9). Often the reason people do not want God and His people to hate evil is that those people themselves are practicing evil. They have not found where God's word says it is wrong to oppose evil, but they themselves are evil and they do not want their evil to be rebuked. But righteous people, who understand God's will, do not object to sin being hated. They see evil in its proper form: ungodliness.

Third, love for sinners and hatred of evil should cause us to rebuke and discipline sin. Love for sinners is not a reason to keep quiet about sin. Instead it is a reason we should speak out against it! It is amazing that so many people are against the rebuke of sin, but there are so many passages which advocate the practice (Leviticus 19:17-18; Proverbs 17:15; Mark 10:21-22; Luke 17:3; Ephesians 4:15; 5:11; 2 Timothy 2:24-26; 4:2-4; Titus 1:9-14; James 5:19-20; Revelation 3:19). We speak out against sin, not because we are mean and hateful, but because God gives us no choice. If we keep quiet, God will condemn us!

Opposition to sin is often not appreciated and is even mistaken for hatred. Our liberal society rebels against all forms of opposition to evil. They try to make Christians appear to be wrong if we speak against sin. They call us "hatemongers" and "antis" and "bashers." This is nothing new for the scriptures mention animosity towards truth many times (1 Kings 22:8; Proverbs 9:8; Amos 5:5, 10; John 7:7; Galatians 4:16). The issue is truly a matter of love. If people accuse us of lacking love, we should not avoid the issue of love. Instead we should show that the real issue is what we should love and what constitutes proper love. When sin is rebuked because we love truth and love the souls of those who sin, we have proper love. The person who objects is the one who has misplaced love.

We should always act out of love according to God's word (Jude 20-23). If we fail then truly God is not pleased (1 Corinthians 13:1-3). But when we love the sinner and we love truth, we will have mercy on the lost and try to snatch them from the fire, hating the stains of the flesh. This is what it means to "hate the sin, but love the sinner." We have so much love for the soul of the one who did wrong that we want him to repent and do right, so we must oppose his sin. When we do this, there will always be people who object. But the reason they object is either because they have misunder-

stood the Bible teaching or because they themselves are sinners who want to continue their sins without the embarrassment of being reproofed. In either case, they are the ones who do not have a proper concept of Bible love.

Adapted from David E. Pratte