GOD HATES SIN BECAUSE HE LOVES SINNERS



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As part of our training at a previous job, the staff watched a video together about sensitivity toward homosexuals. The basic message of the video was: even if you love homosexuals and treat them with dignity and respect, it is bigoted to believe that homosexuality is sin. In fact, it is even wrong to suggest God cares one way or another about how we live our lives. Saying, "God loves sinners, but hates sin" is said to be no more compassionate than saying, "God hates sinners."

I don't have any interest in harping on homosexuality. When I say "sin" that isn't a euphemism for *homosexuality*. Sin means homosexuality (the actions, not the temptations), and promiscuous heterosexuality, and outbursts of anger, and hatred, and envy, and selfishness, and division, and legalism, and worry, and fearfulness, and anything that's not from faith (Rom 14:23). So, this isn't an article about homosexuality. Plus, the phrase, "God loves sinners, but hates sin" is a bit of a cliché anyway, so this article isn't really about that either. I'm happy to drop that phrase from my normal vocabulary because it's lost its effectiveness. What it *is* about is the fact that God loves sinners a whole lot more than the people who made that video do; and one of the ways we know this is *because* He hates sin. (Of course, He also showed us the depth of His love for us in the cross, see Rom 5:8.) God hates sin *because* he loves sinners.[1]

One essential flaw of that video is that it doesn't see sin as something that is inherently harmful to the sinner (and many times, others). To be sure, sin can bring pleasure, but that pleasure is fleeting and never worth it. A night of drunkenness, for example, comes with shame for the stupid things you said and did, consequences of those actions (you can lose friends, hurt the people you love, get in fights, go to jail, and if you drive you can end up killing someone), and all of that is topped off with a hangover. If you've ever spent time with people in that lifestyle, you've heard the phrase, "I feel terrible. I'm never getting drunk again" more than once.

In a documentary about the heavy metal band, Metallica, the lead singer, James Hetfield, was asked what it was like partying all the time and sleeping with lots of different women. His reply was, "It isn't terrible" (only his words were a little more colorful). But I immediately thought, then why are so many of the songs you write about depression, suicide, and other horrors? And when he answered the question he smiled with his mouth but his eyes were sad.

And likewise, whatever Charlie Sheen says, he isn't "winning" and my heart breaks for him as I watch him waste away. And that isn't judgmental; it's concern for a human being.

The idea that sin is something to be desired is a lie. And it's a lie that so many have bought into. It's a lie that can be expressed in a lot of different ways. One of those ways is the thinking I often run into from proponents of Lordship Salvation that says, "If eternal life is really free, why wouldn't I go out and live like the devil?" We have a lot of good answers from Scripture to that question, including the Judgment Seat of Christ and thankfulness, and other things. But one Scriptural answer, I have found, often has a greater impact. I simply reply, "Why on earth would you want to do that?" Sin is a cruel tyrant that seeks to bring you into slavery (Romans 7). Sin makes people miserable (Matt 26:75; Rom 6:21; see also Rom 1:18-31 where being given up to sinfulness is the wrath of God, compare vv 18, 24, and 26), and destroys everything it touches (Rom 6:23a). At the very least, it dissipates your life away (Eph 5:18), leaving you feeling empty.

And leaving those more "glamorous" sins aside, what is fun about a life full of hatred, dissent, worry, anger (not the righteous kind), jealousy, etc.? Sign me up for a life of love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal 5:22-23). Christ has made us free from the bondage of sin (Rom 6:14), why would I willingly take back those chains?

Certainly God hates sin because it is against His righteous and holy nature. This is why Christ's death was necessary for propitiation (Rom 3:23-26). But God also hates sin because God hates it when people suffer.

Lastly, God hates sin because it hinders us from experiencing the greater pleasures that He has designed for us. When God created man, He set him in a garden called "Eden" (Gen 2:8), which is related to the word for pleasure, luxury, delight (see BDB, pp. 726-27), so His intention for man was for us to dwell in and be surrounded by pleasure. Beyond this, David wrote in Ps 16:11, "You will show me the path of life; In Your presence is fullness of joy; At Your right hand are pleasures forevermore." Paul also tells us that being with God brings liberty, "Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor 3:17). Likewise, God's design for us includes love (1 Cor 13:1-4), intimacy (John 14:20; 17:20-26), peace (John 14:27), and glory (Rom 8:18; Col 1:27; 2 Thess 2:14). In fact, His mighty work of redemption was done "that in the ages to come He might show the exceeding riches of His grace in His kindness toward us in Christ Jesus" (Eph 2:7).

Fullness of joy, pleasures forevermore, liberty, love, intimacy, peace, and glory. These are all the things for which every human being longs. And all these things are experienced in fellowship with God. Sin just gets in the way. In my opinion, this is one of the main reasons that one day sin will be completely absent from our experience (Revelation 21–22).

I long for the day when sin will be a distant memory because I long for the day when my fellowship with the Lord and His saints is never again to be strained or hindered. Thank God that His love for sinners is big enough for Him to hate sin.

1 I'm using the term *sinners* in this article to mean those who commit sins, not necessarily those who are sinners by identity.

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