



A Theological and Pastoral Guide to Living Truth and Charity in Today’s World

We live in an age of extremes. On the one hand, there is a tendency to justify any behavior in order to avoid judging anyone. On the other, we find harsh and condemning attitudes that seem to forget God’s mercy. In the midst of these tensions arises a well-known expression within Christianity: **“love the sinner but hate the sin.”**

Many people repeat it. Some reject it. Others misunderstand it. For some, it is a profoundly evangelical statement; for others, it is an excuse to point out the faults of others. But what does it really mean? Is it a biblical teaching? How can it be applied today without falling into either relativism or rigorism?

Understanding this expression correctly is essential because it touches the very heart of the Gospel: the relationship between truth and charity, between justice and mercy, between God’s holiness and His infinite love for every human being.

At a time when people’s identities are often confused with their actions, and where any moral criticism can be interpreted as a personal attack, the wisdom of the Christian tradition offers a profound, balanced, and deeply human response.

The Origin of the Expression

Interestingly, the exact phrase “love the sinner but hate the sin” does not appear literally in the Bible.

Its most well-known formulation is usually attributed to Saint Augustine of Hippo, who wrote:

“*With love for mankind and hatred of sins.*”

This idea was later developed by numerous saints and theologians because it expresses a profoundly Christian truth: God loves the person created in His image, but rejects that which destroys him and separates him from Him.



This distinction is essential.

Sin is not the person.

The person possesses immense dignity because he has been created by God, redeemed by Christ, and called to eternal life.

Sin, on the other hand, is what damages that dignity.

Confusing these two realities leads to serious spiritual errors.

The Gaze of Christ: The Perfect Model

To understand this teaching, we must contemplate Jesus Christ.

No one has loved sinners more than He did.

And no one has condemned sin more clearly.

Jesus approached tax collectors, prostitutes, adulterers, lepers, and outcasts. He ate with them, spoke with them, and offered them friendship.

Yet He never told them that their sin did not matter.

Let us look at some examples.

The Woman Caught in Adultery

When the Pharisees bring before Jesus a woman caught in adultery, they expect condemnation.

Christ responds:

“Let him who is without sin among you be the first to throw a stone at her.” (Jn 8:7)



One by one, the accusers leave.

Then Jesus says to her:

┆ *“Neither do I condemn you; go, and sin no more.” (Jn 8:11)*

Notice the perfect balance.

He does not condemn the person.

But neither does He approve of the sin.

He loves her too much to leave her trapped in it.

Zacchaeus

Zacchaeus was a corrupt tax collector.

Many despised him.

Yet Jesus invites Himself into his house.

That encounter of love provokes an interior transformation.

Zacchaeus declares:

┆ *“I give half of my goods to the poor.”*

Christ did not need to humiliate him publicly.

His love opened the path to repentance.



The Samaritan Woman

The Samaritan woman had had several husbands and was living with a man who was not her husband.

Jesus knows her situation perfectly.

He does not ignore it.

He does not approve of it.

But neither does He reject her.

He gradually leads her toward the truth until she becomes an evangelizer of her own town.

God Hates Sin Because He Loves the Sinner

This statement may seem paradoxical, but it contains a profound truth.

Many people imagine that God hates sin because He is a severe lawgiver obsessed with rules.

The Bible presents a very different reality.

God hates sin precisely because He loves mankind.

A father loves his son.

That is why he hates the drug that may destroy him.

A mother loves her daughter.

That is why she hates whatever enslaves her or causes her suffering.

The rejection does not arise from a lack of love.



It arises from love.

In the same way, God rejects everything that wounds His children.

Sin destroys friendship with God, breaks human relationships, generates suffering, and darkens the soul.

That is why God fights against it.

Not because He wants to limit our happiness.

But because He desires our fulfillment.

Sin Does Not Define a Person’s Identity

One of the great cultural problems of our time is the tendency to identify people with their behavior.

The Christian vision is far deeper.

A man is not simply his mistakes.

A woman is not simply her failures.

No one can be reduced to his sins.

Every human being is much more than his failures.

For this reason, the Church has always defended the dignity of every person, even when his actions are objectively contrary to the Gospel.

This truth is fundamental for evangelization.

If we completely identify a person with his sin, we cease to see in him the image of God.

And when we stop seeing him as a son or daughter of God, it becomes impossible to love him authentically.



The Danger of Relativism: Love Without Truth

Today there is a mistaken interpretation of love.

People think that loving means approving everything.

That correcting someone is hatred.

That warning against evil is intolerance.

That every moral judgment constitutes a judgment of the person.

Yet this contradicts the Gospel.

If a doctor discovers a serious illness and says nothing in order to avoid making the patient uncomfortable, is he loving him?

No.

He is abandoning him.

Likewise, hiding moral truth out of fear of displeasing others is not charity.

True charity always seeks the good of the person.

And good includes truth.

Saint Paul writes:

▮ *“Speaking the truth in love.” (Eph 4:15)*

Truth without love becomes cruelty.

But love without truth becomes deception.



The Opposite Danger: Truth Without Love

If relativism is an error, rigorism is as well.

Some Christians feel called to defend the truth, but forget mercy.

They condemn quickly.

They speak harshly.

They label people.

They focus only on sin.

They forget that they too need God’s forgiveness.

Jesus was far harsher with proud Pharisees than with repentant sinners.

Why?

Because spiritual pride can be more dangerous than many visible sins.

Those who consider themselves righteous run the risk of closing their hearts to grace.

That is why Christ reminds us:

▮ *“Judge not, and you will not be judged.” (Lk 6:37)*

This teaching does not prohibit discerning between good and evil.

It prohibits inwardly condemning people, arrogating to ourselves an authority that belongs to God alone.



What Does It Mean to Truly Love the Sinner?

Loving the sinner involves several concrete attitudes.

1. Recognizing His Dignity

Every person possesses infinite worth.

It does not depend on his behavior.

It does not depend on his successes.

It does not depend on his sins.

It comes from having been created by God.

2. Desiring His Authentic Good

Christian love does not merely seek to make someone feel comfortable.

It seeks his salvation.

It seeks his eternal happiness.

It seeks that he live fully according to God’s plan.

3. Showing Mercy

We are all sinners.

We all need forgiveness.

We all depend on grace.



Remembering this helps us treat others with humility.

4. Correcting with Charity When Necessary

Catholic tradition considers fraternal correction a spiritual work of mercy.

It is not about humiliating.

It is not about demonstrating superiority.

It is about helping.

It must always be done with prudence, humility, and love.

5. Accompanying the Process of Conversion

Conversion rarely happens instantly.

God works patiently within souls.

We too must learn that patience.

Many people need time to understand, heal, and change.

The Christian’s mission is not to replace God’s action but to cooperate with it.

The Cross: The Ultimate Proof of Love for the Sinner and Hatred of Sin

The greatest expression of this teaching is found in the Cross.



There we see two realities simultaneously.

The terrible gravity of sin.

And God’s infinite love for the sinner.

If sin were not something serious, Christ would not have had to suffer and die.

If God did not deeply love the sinner, He would not have accepted that sacrifice either.

The Cross reveals both truths at the same time.

God takes sin with absolute seriousness.

And He loves the human person with an even greater love.

That is why Saint Paul proclaims:

“But God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners,
Christ died for us.” (Rom 5:8)

He did not die for the perfect.

He died for sinners.

He died for us.

Practical Applications for Everyday Life

In the Family

It is possible to disapprove of certain behaviors of a son, a sibling, or a spouse without ceasing to love them deeply.



Firmness and affection are not incompatible.

On Social Media

Digital platforms often encourage polarization.

It is easy to attack people instead of debating ideas.

The Christian is called to remember that behind every screen there is a human being loved by God.

In Evangelization

The truth of the Gospel must be proclaimed in its entirety.

But always with respect, patience, and compassion.

Souls are more readily drawn to the truth when they perceive authentic love.

In Personal Life

We must also apply this teaching to ourselves.

Many people live trapped between two extremes:

Either they justify their sins.

Or they completely identify themselves with them.

The Catholic faith proposes a better path.

Recognize sin.



Repent.

Accept forgiveness.

And remember that our deepest identity is not that of sinners, but of children of God called to holiness.

An Urgent Lesson for Our Time

Perhaps never before has it been so necessary to understand this teaching correctly.

We live in a culture where people are frequently confused with their opinions, mistakes, or sins.

The Gospel proposes a deeper vision.

Christ teaches us to distinguish between the inviolable dignity of the person and that which separates him from his true vocation.

To love the sinner but hate the sin does not mean feeling morally superior.

It does not mean pointing fingers.

It does not mean justifying every behavior.

It means looking at others with the eyes of Christ.

Eyes capable of seeing evil without approving it.

But also capable of discovering, even in the most distant sinner, a creature infinitely loved by God.



Conclusion: The Perfect Synthesis of Truth and Mercy

The phrase “love the sinner but hate the sin” summarizes one of the most beautiful and challenging teachings of Christianity.

It invites us to reject evil without rejecting the one who commits it.

It calls us to defend the truth without losing charity.

It reminds us that every person is worth more than his worst decisions.

And it teaches us that authentic mercy never consists in denying sin, but in helping the sinner find the path to freedom.

In Jesus Christ we contemplate this perfect synthesis.

He did not lower the moral demands of the Gospel.

Yet He never closed the door to anyone seeking conversion.

Therefore, whenever we encounter our own weaknesses or those of others, it is worth remembering His example: a truth that enlightens, a mercy that heals, and a love that never abandons.

For God abhors sin precisely because He loves the sinner immensely. And the more we understand this truth, the more we will learn to love as He loves.