

TRITE, *not* TRUE

JARRETT STEPHENS

rightnow MEDIA

SESSION 4: “Love the Sinner and Hate the Sin”

► SERIES RECAP

You and I are swimming in a culture full of opinions masquerading as wisdom. What’s worse, much of what passes as wisdom today has the ring of biblical truth. How do you tell the difference? How do we see through half-truths and self-help trends to access the deep wisdom of God’s Word and the full life found in Him alone?

Those are the questions Jarrett Stephens tackles in his series Trite, Not True – where he explores six of the most common pop philosophies that influence people’s lives today, including Christians.

As you dive in, you’ll discover how to decipher superficial insights from the real truth of God’s Word, as well as how to apply biblical wisdom to your everyday life. Because ultimately, the life of meaning and impact you long for doesn’t come from a philosophy, platitude, maxim, or mantra... but from one person, Jesus Christ.

► OPEN

(Simple intro to frame the objective of the group study, break the ice, and get people thinking)

Ask the group: Has anyone ever said to you, “I’m sorry you feel that way.” It sounds compassionate. They care about your feelings, right? Possibly. But how does that phrase often make you feel? What do people sometimes really mean when they use it?

In today’s session, we’ll be looking at a phrase that’s often preached from the pulpit, and it’s technically true. But it’s also an instance of something said inside the church that can often hurt those outside the church. It’s...

“Love the sinner and hate the sin.”

Have you ever heard this? In what context? Is it something you think you’d hear Jesus say? Let’s find out.

► WATCH THE VIDEO

Jarrett Says: If we are to look like Jesus, then loving sinners will be high on our priority list. It’s what we as Christians should do. It’s who we are and what we should be about.

But we are also commanded to hate sin – anything in life that doesn’t resemble Jesus, reflect Jesus, or bring honor to Jesus.

If we focus on hating the sin of *others*, however, instead of simply hating *sin*, this will negatively affect our ability to love them – and their ability to receive our love. Because if we’re not extremely careful, we can mistake someone’s *actions* for their *identity*.

And focusing more on *what someone does* than *who they are* will short-circuit our ability to love them as the Bible commands.

► DISCUSS (ASK YOUR GROUP):

When you hear the phrase, “Love the sinner and hate the sin,” what immediately comes to mind? When have you heard it used?

What do you think about Jarrett’s suggestion to change “Love the sinner and hate the sin” to “Love sinners. Hate sin?”

Is there a difference? If so, what is it? Why does it matter?

DIG DEEPER: In Luke 19:1–9, Jesus dines at the house of Zacchaeus, a known sinner. Although those who are ‘righteous’ immediately point out Zacchaeus’ sin, Jesus doesn’t say a word about it – even though He has every right to. After quality time with Jesus, Zacchaeus not only voluntarily repents of his sin, but he also offers to pay back those he cheated *four times* as much as he took, showing true life change.

What are some ways you can practically follow Jesus’ example and inspire this kind of true life change in others?

► WHAT THE WORLD SAYS

When Christians say, “Love the sinner and hate the sin,” they often do it to refute the unbiblical idea that God hates sinners. What Christians mean is, “God loves people even when they do terrible things.” It’s a quick way to affirm God’s love for people without affirming sin in general or one sin in particular.

It’s meant to be *comforting* to sinners. But that’s not always the way people perceive it.

Why might this be a problem?

Ask Yourself: If someone looked at one of your habitual sins and said, “Well, you should love the sinner and hate the sin,” about you, how would you feel? Respected? Encouraged? Interested in anything else that person had to say? Probably not.

Pastor Jarrett said the phrase “love the sinner and hate the sin,” can be the equivalent of saying, “I’m sorry. But...”

Has someone ever said that to you after they hurt you? How did it make you feel?

When non-Christians hear, “Love the sinner and hate the sin,” what do you think their perception is of the person saying it? If that perception becomes their reality, how do you think it might impact their perception of Jesus?

► WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS

Pastor Jarrett told the story of the woman caught in adultery. Let’s read it again.

Ask a participant to read John 8:1–5.

Let’s think about this part of the story from the point of view of the participants:

(Have everyone answer questions together or divide the group into three sections and give each section a “role” to play: the Pharisees, the woman, and the disciples. Then have each section answer questions about the experience from “their” point of view.)

Pharisees: How do you think the Pharisees felt when they found the woman and brought her to Jesus? Can you identify with any of their feelings or motivations? If so, which ones? Were their actions justifiable by Scripture?

Why or why not?

The Woman caught in adultery: How do you think she felt about adultery before she was caught? What reasons might she have for committing adultery? How do you think she felt about the Pharisees? How do you think she would describe God?

The Disciples: How do you think the disciples felt as they watched this scene unfold? They had been raised in Jewish culture, and they knew the Law. If you had been there, what would you have wanted Jesus to do?

Now let’s read the rest of the story. And as we read it, try to feel it from the perspective of each person or group, as if you were in their shoes.

Ask a participant to read John 8:6–11.

Jesus starts writing. All eyes go to Him. He takes the crowd’s gaze. He takes the accusation, the questions, the gossip. Then he reveals everyone’s heart with these words: “*Let him who is without sin cast the first stone.*”

Next, Jesus reveals God’s heart with these words: “*Neither do I condemn; go, and from now on sin no more.*”

The entire crowd recognized the sin – and they were right. But only Jesus also loved the sinner –and that was His starting point for wanting to see her freed from sin.

► APPLY THE BIBLICAL TRUTH IN YOUR LIFE

Think about the example Christ Himself set in His time on earth. As Christians, how can we avoid miscommunicating His message?

Ask members of the group to read the following verses:

- Colossians 4:5–6
- Ephesians 4:15
- Galatians 5:13–14

What themes emerge in these verses? How should we use our freedom in Christ to treat others?

If we can see people the way Jesus sees them, our perception of them will likely change.

Two takeaways about loving sinners and hating sin:

1. God never asks us to excuse sin

Sin breaks people. It is – in every way – the opposite of the full, rich life God made us for. He created us to be connected to Him and to mirror His beautiful, perfect, holy character to the world. Sin breaks that connection and binds us to hurt and pain instead, making us slaves to fear. This is why God hates sin and why we should hate it too.

2. God always asks us to love like Jesus

Despite the presence of sin in the world, God has not given up on His plan to connect with us and spread His goodness in the world through us. Loving others the way Jesus does 1) gives us the opportunity to mirror His character and 2) shows others how beautiful a connection with God can be.

► **CLOSE**

What we say isn't always what people hear.

Miscommunication happens, and what people *perceive* you're saying often becomes their reality.

As Christians, we should never ignore or lessen the reality of sin. But instead of focusing on someone's sin and the consequences of it, let's be like Jesus and focus first on the person whom God loves despite their sin – just like He loves each of us. As we love people like Jesus does, we'll gain a platform for speaking honestly about sin and its devastating consequences.

Then the world will see the true heart of God.

Prayer: Heavenly Father, thank You for Your kindness toward us. Thank You for loving us despite our sin and for coming to live among us so we can understand You better—and we can know You understand us. Please help us to see others through Your eyes and love them with Your love. Keep us from sin and draw us closer to You. We love You. In His name, Amen.

► NOTES

