

363 'Love the sinner, hate the sin'

One of my correspondents has just reiterated: 'love the sinner, hate the sin', and I would certainly describe this person as 'love in action'. So let's examine this idea.

Suppose it's me that's sinning – and going on sinning unrepentently – and suppose you're my Christian friend, what would I want you to do? If you really love me, you should jolly well take me on one side – maybe with another Christian friend, or a church leader – and challenge me, because I need to repent and stop sinning. Sin is serious!

My warrant for this is 1 Cor 5, for starters, though that's a bit of an extreme case; Paul says that even pagans don't commit that particular sexual sin. But maybe look at Romans 6: Paul addresses those who are 'baptized into the Messiah, Jesus' and are 'united with him' and yet they 'go on sinning'. So he reminds them (and me) that 'the wages of sin is death'!

From other things that Paul says, I don't believe he's saying that I won't ultimately be saved, but deliberately going on sinning while I'm trying to live in an open relationship with God is simply a contradiction in terms! So if I'm going on sinning, please take me on one side – I need to repent.

But hang on, what is sin? And what is repentance?

Jesus' companions said that he was without sin – and I believe them. Yet the 'church leaders' of the day (Pharisees etc.) said he was sinning, breaking the law. And we have recorded incidents where Jesus did break the Jewish law – he and his disciples.

A theologically trained friend said, 'Not everything is written as a moral absolute. The expectation of making everything into a moral absolute came later.' That set me thinking.

Our church services – certainly in the Cof E – encourage us to think of the wrong things we have 'thought, said and done' this week, and then to repent of them. We are regularly pointed towards seeing sin as '**things we do wrong**' and repentance as saying sorry and trying not to do them again. It's all about sin**s** (plural), not about sin as an attitude.

Might it be more helpful (more biblical?) to think of sin more as an attitude of mind; more about motivation, direction? Is our desire really to love God with all that we have and are, and to constantly love our neighbours as ourselves? Maybe repentance could be thought of as turning back to God and making that attitude of love more our *actual* priority?

So let's go back to the gay folk I mentioned^[362] (Claire and Diane are real actual people – 'Claire' was a member of our homegroup for years). If you hold the traditional view, are you saying that we should see their relationship in moral terms: they are 'sinning'? Yet their total motivation is loving God, and loving the folk around them.

How would *you* define what is sin for Claire? Difficult, isn't it?