

Scriptural Love And Hate

'Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute, mistreat or hate you; bless those who curse you; treat well those who hate you ... to show that you are the children of your Father Who is in heaven; for He makes His sun rise on the good and the wicked, and makes rain fall upon the righteous and sinner; for if you only love those who love you, what reward can you have? Even the wicked do that' (Matthew 5:44 to 46; Luke 6:27 & 35).

'Let your love be sincere. Hate that which is evil. Love and cling to that which is good' (Romans 12:9).

'You have this to your credit; you hate the works (deeds, behaviour) of the Nicolaitans, which I (the Lord) also hate' (Revelation 2:6).

The believers in the Ephesian church hated the evil that the Nicolaitans were involved in. Many people are afraid to talk about hate because they believe all hate is evil. There are two main uses for the one word 'hate' in the English translation of the Bible. One is a very strong word which means a deep sense of loathing, detestation or abhorrence; something so wicked that it must be absolutely rejected; but we will see the other use of the same word, simply means to 'love less than'. In the scriptures, we see there is good love and bad love; good hate and bad hate. To hate (loathe) sin and wickedness, is a good thing, and as we see in the scriptures, God hates sin and wickedness. On the other hand, to hate a person is a bad thing, because Jesus died for all people (1 Peter 3:18). We can hate wicked behaviour, but we must never hate the person. An example of that is if a young child pulls our knitting off the knitting needles and proceeds to tug at the wool, unravelling hours of hard, tedious work. We would hate what the child did, but we would never hate the child.

What do the scriptures say? 'If anyone says, "I love God," and hates his brother (another Christian), he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, cannot love God, Whom he has not seen, and this command we have from God Himself, that he who loves God, shall love his brother' (1 John 4:20 & 21). We need to sincerely love our Christian brothers and sisters, because if we don't, God calls us a liar. If we love God we will love fellow Christians, because love covers (ignores) the sins (idiosyncrasies) of others (1 Peter 4:8). One of the most fundamental commandments written in the scriptures is the imperative to love our fellow man as ourself (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39). Hatred towards other human beings is opposite to that ideal.

Examples of good righteous love is to love the Lord, to love serving Him, to love our family, both natural and spiritual. But ... unrighteous love, is the love of money, an overindulgence of food or to love someone else's spouse. A bad form of love can get us into serious trouble. If a man menacingly stalks a former girlfriend whom he claims to 'love', he may be arrested. In the scriptures there is a story about love turning to hatred that destroyed lives. King David's son Amnon believed he was 'in love' with his half-sister Tamar. He tricked her into coming into his bedchamber where he brutally raped her, then his so-called love, which was actually nothing less than wicked lust, turned into utter hatred. He humiliated her further by having her thrown out, thus destroying her whole life. Then to avenge Tamar, her brother Absalom had Amnon murdered (2 Samuel 13:1 to 22 & 32). Amnon's 'love' for Tamar was certainly not righteous; it was hateful wickedness.

Love and hate are both normal emotions created within us. The Lord also loves and hates. They are opposite emotions; love accepts; hate rejects. Love is connection; hate is separation. The emotions themselves are not wrong, it is just a question of what we do with these opposing emotions, and what direction we take them. One example is a horse that pulls its cart into a ditch. It does so because it is walking in the wrong direction or is misled. There is nothing wrong with the horse – only the direction it was facing. A human example would be of a person with a big appetite who allows themselves to have an unhealthy diet. There is nothing wrong with the appetite or the food, rather how it is (mis)used. They simply need to redirect their love of food to a more healthy menu. Hate in the right direction can be beneficial. Recently an Australian man became a hero when he saw a car sinking into a river with a little baby trapped inside. He hated (abhorred, detested) the thought that the helpless infant would drown, so he dived into the flooded river and rescued the baby, putting his own life in serious danger. The man laid down his own life to save the baby. 'Greater love has no man, than to lay down his life for a friend' (John 15:13).

Hate per se is not evil. It is merely an absolute and total rejection of, or disgust in, a particular thing. If that thing is a bad situation, hate can be a very powerful tool to be used for good. If one hates evil, one will have the courage to fight against it for good. The problem is not hate itself, but when it is misdirected. That is what we need to guard against – not hate itself – but hating those people and things that should be loved. Hate is misunderstood, misconstrued and can be equated with things it is not. Hate has been branded the darkest evil, so much so that it has become the most feared subject. So is love always good? Is hate always bad? It depends on whom or what we are loving or hating.

The discomfort caused by discussing hatred is valid because most hate is wrong but that is because most hate is expressed by violating the rights of other people, like Amnon did to Tamar. If our hatred for a crime, so morally appalling and adverse to our beliefs, causes us to oppose it, then that is good hate; it is the absolute rejection of something we ought to be rejecting. So it is not the hate that is bad as much as it is the crime. Hate has been equated with crime, because it is most often expressed by a crime. If we hate crime, that is a good hate. Discussing hatred is the height of political incorrectness and that causes real foolishness. If all hate was evil, how would we be able to hate racism and the vile crimes of Nazism, rape, pornography and murder? We need to hate and utterly reject these things. When the Lord says to hate evil, He means these kinds of loathsome, detestable, abhorrent evils. Hate is only okay as a true rejection of something fundamentally wrong, and cannot be an expression of our own ego or our jealousy. Hate should be a catalyst for constructive growth, and not a cause for destruction.

Sometimes the English word 'hate' when used in the Bible, is mis-used and is too strong for the occasion, and God cannot possibly mean for us to actually hate, but rather to love less. One example is when the Lord God said: 'Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated'. If we look at the whole picture, we see that the Lord hated Esau's attitude and his deed rather than the man himself. 'Rebekah conceived two sons by Isaac and the children were yet unborn and had so far done nothing either good or evil. Even so, in order to carry out God's purpose which does not depend on works, but on Him Who calls, it was said to Rebekah, that the elder son would serve the younger son. As it is written, Jacob I have loved but Esau I have hated' (Romans 9:10 to 13). If we rephrase that verse, we could say, "I have held Esau in relative disregard in comparison to My love for Jacob." Rebekah

felt exactly the same way. She loved Jacob much more than she loved Esau, and after Jacob had already tricked Esau out of his birthright, Rebekah helped trick Esau out of his inheritance too. That action in turn caused Esau to hate Jacob (Genesis 25:21 to 34 then 27:1 to 46).

The Lord was so angry with Esau, He destroyed the land that was named Edom after him. The Lord 'laid waste His mountains, and his heritage I have given to the jackals of the wilderness'. When the people tried to build up the land, the Lord destroyed it again (Malachi 1:2 to 5). So why did the Lord feel so strongly? Because Esau scorned his birthright (Genesis 25:31 to 34). That was something Esau deeply regretted later and sought to have reinstated, but it was too late. It had been given to Jacob (Genesis 27:36; Hebrews 12:16 & 17). In the Law given to Moses, the eldest son had the God-given right to the largest portion of the family's inheritance so he could provide for their mother and younger siblings (Deuteronomy 21:16 & 17). Esau had reneged on his God-given right and his God-given responsibility to his family. That rebellious attitude destroyed Esau's relationship with God, so Esau's natural inheritance was given to Jacob. If Esau hadn't behaved so badly, it would be Esau's name in the line of patriarchs, not Jacob's. The Lord would be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Esau. That is how important our obedience to God is, even when we do not fully understand why things are asked of us. So, God hated what Esau did so much, it turned God against Esau forever.

There is another example in the scriptures that tells us that 'hate' is not what God means, because to accept it, is to contradict God's own words written in the Bible ... 'You shall not hate your brother' (Leviticus 19:17). 'Honour your father and your mother and he who speaks evil of his father or mother, let him be put to death' (Matthew 15:4). 'Husbands, love your wives' (Colossians 3:19). 'Whoever hated his own flesh?' (Ephesians 5:29). But ... what did Jesus say? 'If anyone comes to Me and does not 'hate' his own father and mother, his wife, and children and his brother and sister and even his own life cannot be My disciple' (Luke 14:26). Well ... quite obviously Jesus did not mean for us to literally 'hate' our family, and we can see here, that the English word 'hate' is far too strong for this occasion. To rephrase that verse, we could say we need to 'love our family less than' we love God. In other words, we need to put the Lord first in our lives, before anyone else, including our parents, spouse, siblings, children and our own desires.

Here is another example of the English word 'hate' being too strong for the occasion. 'Leah became pregnant and bore a son and said, "The Lord has given me this son (Simeon – God hears) because He has heard that I am hated"' (Genesis 29:33). Leah was not 'hated' by Jacob, but she was 'loved less than' Rachel. 'Rachel was beautiful ... He (Jacob) loved Rachel more than Leah' (Genesis 29:17 & 30). The verse says Jacob 'loved' Rachel more than he 'loved' Leah, because Rachel was beautiful and Leah was less attractive.

Another example of the mis-use of 'hate' can be found in Proverbs. 'He who spares the rod, 'hates' his son' (Proverbs 13:24). Obviously no father would actually hate his son, but if the father wanted what is best for his child, then a good father will discipline and guide the child in the right direction – the direction of the Lord and thus salvation. 'Foolishness is bound up in the heart of the child and the rod of discipline will drive it from him' (Proverbs 22:15). 'Do not withhold discipline from the child, for if you punish him, he will not die (spiritually) ... but you will deliver his soul from hell' (Proverbs 23:13 & 14).

There was a righteous man mentioned in the Bible named Boaz, who did the opposite to Esau, and took responsibility for family as it was commanded by God. 'If a man dies and has no son, his inheritance shall pass to his daughters. If he has no daughters, his inheritance shall go to his brothers. If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his fathers brothers, then to his next of kin and he shall possess it' (Numbers 27:8 to 11). That family though, were only distantly related to him, and only by marriage – not by blood, but to honour God, Boaz accepted the responsibility for the two women, Naomi and Ruth. This inheritance was not only about land, it came with the responsibility of caring for the family. There were no social services and old age pensions in those days, so somebody had to care for the widows, fatherless and the elderly. This righteous man Boaz, took full responsibility for his distant cousin's family, and God was so pleased with his attitude, God blessed him and he became the great grandfather of King David and an important ancestor of Jesus our Messiah (Ruth 2:1 to 4:22).

If Esau had done what was right, he would have been an ancestor of Jesus instead of Jacob. Eight generations later, Boaz was righteous and did what was right in the sight of the Lord, and was moved to the position where he actually became an ancestor of our Messiah. One man (Esau) was stripped of his blessing and claim to the royal lineage because of a wrong attitude; he did not love or respect his God-given birthright, whereas the other man (Boaz) was moved by God to inherit a blessing and became King David's great grandfather because of a right attitude, and he loved the Laws of Moses and obeyed them. Let us all love everything that is good, holy and right; but hate everything that is evil.

Amen and God bless you.

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