

Scriptural Love And Hate

'Love your enemies. Bless those who curse you. Be good to those who hate you. Pray for those who persecute or mistreat you to show you are the children of your Father Who is in heaven, for He makes His sun rise on the good and the wicked, and sends rain to fall on the righteous and sinner. If you only love those who love you, what reward can you have? Even the wicked do that' (Matthew 5:44 to 46).

Many people are afraid to talk about hate because they believe all hate is evil. To hate, abhor or 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 (2 Corinthians 5:15). There are two main uses for the one word 'hate' in the Bible. One 'hate' is a very strong word meaning a deep sense of loathing, detestation or abhorrence; something so wicked it must be absolutely rejected. The Hebrew word is 'shnau'. One example of this kind of hate is the way God hates sin. '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 other use of 'hate', means to 'love less than' or in Hebrew, 'shna'. 'God saw Leah was hated and He opened her womb but Rachel was barren' (Genesis 29:31). Leah was not actually hated by Jacob, she was loved less than Rachel. 'Rachel was beautiful ... 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. When the Lord God said, "Jacob I have loved but Esau I have hated," 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, but so the purpose of God was done, which does not depend on works but on Him Who calls, it was said to Rebekah, the elder son will 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 loved Jacob but held Esau in contempt." 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 genuinely hate Jacob (Genesis 25:21 to 34; 27:1 to 45).

The Lord was so angry with Esau, He destroyed the land named Edom after him. The Lord 'laid waste His mountains, and his heritage I have given to the jackals of the wilderness'. When people tried to build up the land, the Lord destroyed it again (Malachi 1:2 to 4). So why did the Lord feel so strongly? Because Esau scorned his birthright and it was something Esau deeply regretted later and sought to have reinstated but it was too late, it had been given to Jacob (Hebrews 12:16 & 17). In the Law of Moses, when the father died, the eldest son had the God-given right to the largest portion of the family's inheritance so he could provide for their widowed mother and younger siblings (Deuteronomy 21:17). Esau had reneged on his God-given right and responsibility to honour his mother. That rebellious attitude destroyed Esau's relationship with God, so Esau's natural inheritance was given to Jacob. If Esau had not behaved so badly, it would be Esau's name in the line of patriarchs, not Jacob's. If Esau had done what was right, he would have been an ancestor of Jesus instead of Jacob. The Lord would be the God of Abraham, Isaac and Esau, or possibly the God of Abraham, Isaac, Esau and Jacob. That is how important our obedience to God is, even when we do not fully understand why things are asked of us.

There is another example in the scriptures that tells us '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). What did Jesus say? 'If anyone comes to Me and does not 'hate' his own father and mother, his wife, children, his brother and sister and even his own life cannot be My disciple' (Luke 14:26). Obviously Jesus did not mean for us to literally 'hate' our family, and we can see here the 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, our lives and our own desires. 'He who spares the rod, 'hates' his son but the parent who loves their son is careful to discipline him' (Proverbs 13:24). Obviously no parent would actually hate their son, but if the parents want what is best for the child, then a good parent will discipline and guide the child in the right direction – the direction of the Lord and thus salvation. '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).

We should hate wicked behaviour, but we must never hate the person. For example, if a young child pulls 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. Likewise, God loves all people but He hates sin. If we love God we will love fellow Christians because love covers (ignores) the sins (faults, idiosyncrasies) of others (1 Peter 4:8). 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 it has become the most feared subject. Is hate always bad? Is love always good? It depends on whom or what we are loving or hating. ‘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. This command we have from God Himself, he who loves God should love his brother’ (1 John 4:20 & 21). We need to sincerely love our Christian brothers and sisters because if we do not, God calls us a liar. 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.

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. In the scriptures there is a story about love turning to hatred that destroyed several 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. 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. 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.

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 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 healthier 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 the thought 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). Examples of good righteous love is to love the Lord, to love serving Him, to love the Word of God, to love our family, both natural and spiritual. Examples of unrighteous love are the love of money or the love and enjoyment of sin. Unrighteous love can get us into serious trouble.

Eight generations after Esau, there was a righteous man named Boaz who did the opposite to Esau and took responsibility for family as God commanded. ‘If a man dies and has no son, his inheritance will pass to his daughters. If he has no daughters, his inheritance will go to his brothers. If he has no brothers, give his inheritance to his father’s brothers, then to his next of kin and he will possess it’ (Numbers 27:8 to 11). Naomi was only distantly related and only by marriage – not by blood, but to honour God, Boaz accepted the responsibility for 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). One man (Esau) was stripped of his eternal blessing and claim to the royal lineage because of his wrong attitude. He did not love or respect his God-given birthright, whereas the other man (Boaz) was blessed by God and inherited an eternal blessing because of his right attitude. He loved the Laws of Moses and obeyed them. Let us all sincerely love everything that is good, holy and right, but hate everything that is evil. ‘Let your love be sincere. Hate that which is evil. Cling to that which is good’ (Romans 12:9).

Amen and God bless you.

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