

# Is Hate Also Grand?

Romans 9:1-13

Preached by Greg Giles at the Evangelical Free Church of Bemidji on September 27, 2009

Isn't love grand? Last month Jean and I took three of our grandchildren to the new playground at Diamond Point Park. A woman walking past saw us playing with our grandkids and called out, "Isn't love grand!" Of course, I agreed with her. I wonder if she realized that she was really saying "Isn't God grand!" since God is the source of all love and He alone expresses it in pure form. Last week we said that we are never more like God than when we love.

What if that woman at Diamond Point Park had said, "Isn't hate grand!" Somehow, that lacks the same ring! I would not have agreed, but I have a confession to make: I hate half the people at church this morning. I know that sounds terrible, but stay with me, I'll explain in a few minutes.

I have a question for you: Does God ever hate? We might expect the answer to be "Of course not." After all, God is love, God loves all creation—even His enemies, He commands us to respond with love to those who hate us, and Galatians says that love is a fruit of the Spirit while hatred is a work of the flesh—so how could God ever hate? I wish it were that simple, but the Bible says that God hates. This occurs eighteen times in both Old and New Testaments<sup>1</sup>. If we take the whole Bible as God's word we must also deal with these passages as well.

Of the eighteen times God is said to hate, ten of them relate to hating deeds, not people. God hates sin. He hates idolatry, pride, lying, stealing, violence, and divorce. Ironically, He hates hatred, since it is one of the sinful deeds of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21). The Bible not only says that God hates sin, but He abhors it, He detests it, it makes Him angry. There are two reasons God hates sin. First, it is a contradiction of His character. For example, God's character is truth. If I tell a lie, I contradict His very nature. I also deny His right to set the standards for my life. Sin is anti-God.

But sin is also anti-us. God's laws were given for our benefit. When we break those laws we hurt ourselves and we hurt those around us. Last week Daniel Carpenter was telling me about his former job as a playground monitor at an elementary school. We might think that supervising kids at a playground would be a pleasant job, right?—kids swinging, climbing, playing tag, having fun. I'm sure much of it was like that, but kids can also be hateful and hurtful. Daniel says that a big part of his job was protecting children from each other. There were playground bullies, big kids picking on small kids, and there were kids deliberately destroying the things other kids were making, like snow forts. Bullies make me angry. If sin makes us angry, think of how it affects a holy God: He hates it! He hates sin because He wants to protect us from hurting ourselves.

So ten of the eighteen places in the Bible that talk about God's hatred are talking about His hatred of sin. But the other eight verses speak of God hating people. How can we reconcile the biblical truth that God is love with these verses that say that God hates people?

Last week we said that there are five categories of God's love in the Bible<sup>2</sup>: God's loving character, His care for all creation, His saving love, His covenantal love and His conditional love. Perhaps we can use these categories to help us understand God's hate. Are there five parallel categories of God's hate? Is hatred part of God's character? Does He also hate His creation? Is His saving-love matched by condemning hatred? The good news is that there is no hate-parallel for these first three categories of God's love. Let me explain.

The first category of God's love is His character. The Bible says that God *is* love. The Bible never says that God is hate. Some world religions teach that God's character is always a balance of opposites: yin and yang, hot and cold, good and evil, love and hate. But the Bible doesn't describe God as a balance. He is perfection. He is all light and no darkness. He is all righteousness and no wickedness. He is all truth and no deceit. He is all love and no hate. The Bible never states that God's character includes hatred.

The second category of God's love we looked at last week is His care for all His creatures. He provides for them, protects them, shows them compassion and mercy. God even loves them when they turn against Him. The Bible never divides off a category of creatures that God doesn't love. God loves both Packer fans and Viking fans! His care for creation is universal.

<sup>1</sup> The 18 passages are Deuteronomy 12:31; 16:21-22; Psalm 5:4-5; Psalm 11:4-7; Proverbs 6:16-18; 8:12 (God's wisdom hates pride), Isaiah 1:13-16; 61:8; Jeremiah 12:7-9; 44:4-6; Hosea 9:15; Amos 5:21; Zechariah 8:16; Malachi 1:2-3; 2:16; Romans 9:6-13; Hebrew 1:8-9 (the Son hates lawlessness); Revelation 2:6. The total number might vary depending on the English translation used. The passages marked with an \* state that God hates the person and not just the sinful behavior.

<sup>2</sup> I used Don Carson's description of five categories of God's love as found in the Bible ("LOVE" in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*. IVP, 2000, pages 646-650). I have slightly altered his categories based on my study.

The third category of God's love is His saving love. The Bible says that God so loved the rebellious world that He sent His Son to save whoever believes in Him (John 3:16-17). Christ died on the cross for our sins and for the sins of the whole world (1 John 2:2). In the Old Testament God called out, "Why will you die, O house of Israel? For I take no pleasure in the death of anyone" (Ezek 18:31-32). The Bible is clear: there is no one, no one, outside of God's desire to save.

So, the eight biblical passages referring to God hating people do not relate to His character, to His care for creation, or to His saving love. If there is a hatred-parallel to God's love it will have to be found in the final two categories: God's covenantal love and His conditional love.

Let's look at the fourth category of God's love: His covenantal love. Two of the verses that speak of God's hate occur in the context of God's making a covenant with His chosen people. The two passages are Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:10-13. Actually they are not two different verses but the same verse quoted twice: "Jacob I have loved, but Esau I have hated." To say that God hates Esau seems to contradict the idea that He is love. Let's look at this more closely.

If you remember the story in Genesis, you recall that Jacob and Esau were the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah. Esau was the older twin and so, according to the culture of that day, he deserved the special blessing from his father Isaac. Isaac intended to bless Esau but Rebekah connived with Jacob to deceive his father and cheat his brother out of their father's blessing. What a messed up family! We might have expected God to reject Jacob's con job and restore the blessing to Esau, but He didn't. The Bible says that before they were even born God had chosen Jacob to rule over his elder brother. This had nothing to do with their behavior, good or bad (Romans 9:12). Jacob did not deserve to be chosen above Esau. God chose Jacob for His own reasons, not ours. Theologians call this process of God choosing "divine election".

To understand this particular instance of God's election, we need to realize that this story is not just a story about two boys, not at all. Each of the twin boys became the father of a nation. Jacob became the father of Israel, the Jewish people, and Esau was the father of Edom, a country adjacent to Israel. The two passages which say "Jacob I have loved, Esau I have hated" are actually talking about Jacob's country and Esau's country. In Malachi "God loved Jacob" clearly means that He loved the nation of Israel, and "God hated Esau" means He hated the country of Edom. In Romans the reference to Esau's country has been expanded to include all the gentile nations. When God said that He loved Jacob it means that He chose Israel, Jacob's country, to be His covenant people. When God says that He hated Esau it means that He rejected Edom and the other nations as His covenant people. In the Old Testament God had only one "chosen people" and He chose Israel. He loved Israel with a special love.

So the two passages, "Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated", relate to the fourth category of God's love: His covenantal love. These verses do not relate to God's character or His care for all creation or to His saving love. These verses do not say that God didn't like Esau the man or that He didn't bless Esau (in fact the Bible says Esau was blessed: Gen.33, Joshua 24:4), or that Esau had no opportunity to be saved—maybe he is in heaven today, the Bible doesn't say. The verses, "Jacob I have loved and Esau I have hated" tell us that Israel was chosen to be God's covenantal people and Edom and the other gentile nations were rejected.

But why would the Bible use such strong language as to say that God hated Esau? That sounds bad! Instead of "hate", couldn't the Bible have simply said that God did not choose Esau? That's how we would have said it in English. But the Bible wasn't written in English or with our cultural sensitivities. In modern English we tend to avoid strong language so as not to offend people, but often the biblical writers were not concerned about offending others. For example, there is a similar passage in Luke 14. Jesus told His disciples that in order to follow Him they should hate their father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, and their own life (Luke 14:25-26). That really sounds bad! Does Jesus want us to hate our families? Of course not. Jesus is using exaggerated language to make a point. Such exaggerated language is typical of the Semitic culture of Bible times. What Jesus meant is that we should love Him more than the people we love the most: our families (see Matthew 10:37). To love Jesus and hate our family merely means that we love Jesus more—not that we love family less.

Let me give an example. I told you earlier that I hate half of the people here in church today. I know that sounds bad, so let me explain. I hate all of the women here—except one. Jean I have loved, every other woman I have hated. Please, women, understand that my hatred is nothing personal—really! I don't mean that I dislike the other women here, or that I don't want the best for them, or that I don't want to see them in heaven—I do! But Jean is the one I chose to enter into a covenant relationship with. I chose her for my wife. I love her in a special way. Compared to her, I "hate" every other woman. Whenever any of us enter into a marriage covenant we choose one partner for our special love and we do not share that

love with anyone else. To say we hate the other women may sound strange to our modern ears, but this is how they said it in the biblical languages. I only get one wife: I chose Jean. God only gets one chosen people: He chose Jacob's country, and He rejected every other option. Jacob He loved, Esau He hated.

There, we have dealt with two passages where the Bible says that God hates. It seems to me that the hatred in these verses is really just a linguistic idiom, not hatred at all! But there are still six passages to go. All of them relate to the fifth category: God's conditional love.

The four categories of God's love we have looked at so far are unconditional. God loves us because He is love, not because we are lovable. But the Bible also speaks about a conditional side to God's love. When we obey God's law we remain in His love. This is the normal situation since God is love. But when we disobey, we move to His hatred. Nowadays we have a popular saying that we should hate the sin and love the sinner, and there is a sense that this is true since we are to love all people, even our enemies. But the Bible doesn't describe God as hating the sin while loving the sinner. The Bible doesn't distinguish a person from his deeds. When someone sins, God's hatred toward the sin is also aimed at the person who did the sin. God hates the sin and therefore hates the sinner.

I know this is hard. When I told Jean that I would be preaching on God's hatred for sinners, she protested, "I prefer singing 'Jesus loves me this I know' to 'God hates me.'" (I'm not sure there are any hymns about God's hatred!) Perhaps it helps to think that there are only six verses about God's hatred compared to hundreds about His love. But those six are in the Bible so we need to take them seriously.

An example is Proverbs 6:16-19, which describes God's hatred in the form of an anatomy lesson including eyes, tongue, hands, heart, and feet.

There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to Him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked schemes, feet that are quick to rush into evil, a false witness who pours out lies, and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

Notice that this passage starts with God hating seven sins but by the end He is also described as hating the person who does the sin. Psalm 11:4-5 says,

The Lord is in His holy temple; the Lord's throne is in heaven. His eyes watch, His eyes examine all people. The Lord approves of the godly, but He hates the wicked and those who love to do violence.

The Bible is clear that sin is an offence to God and that He is angry with those who sin. The Bible refers to sinners as "objects of wrath" (Eph. 2:3). They are also objects of His hate. Since all have sinned and fall short of His glory, then all of us become objects of wrath and of hate.

How can we reconcile the verse "God is love", God's loving character, with these six statements that He hates sinners? This is not an easy question. Can God love and hate someone at the same time? Let me make four observations about God's conditional love and hate.

First, God's love is absolute, His hatred is conditional. God's love is intentional, His hatred is reactionary—a response to a change in human behavior<sup>3</sup>. God's character doesn't change, but when our behavior changes His attitude responds. God's character is not only love, it is also righteousness. When we sin, His righteousness is offended. Hatred is not an inherent part of God's character, but a side-effect of His offended righteousness.

God does not desire to hate anyone, just as a parent does not desire to be angry with their children. In fact, God warns humanity not to sin so we will not incur His wrath. In the garden He warned Adam and Eve not to eat the forbidden fruit or they would die (Gen 2:16-17). He warned Israel not to disobey the law or they would experience curses instead of blessings (Lev 26:14-17). He tells Christians to keep ourselves within His love (Jude 21). God doesn't want to hate. Love is an essential part of God's character; hatred is a side effect of His righteousness.

My second observation is that God's love and God's righteousness, the two aspects of His character, sometimes result in God feeling mixed emotions: He loves *and* hates at the same time. Probably every parent understands this sense of mixed emotions: you love your children, but there are moments when....

Perhaps we see God's mixed emotions most clearly in the book of Hosea. Do you remember the story? The prophet Hosea married Gomer, a girl with a wandering eye and a wandering heart. Gomer was unfaithful to Hosea. She had three children but Hosea was not sure they were really his. Then

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<sup>3</sup> Some theologians object to the idea that God could ever respond to human choices. They say that if God reacts to the choices made by others, He is no longer sovereign. However, the six verses on God's hatred all describe it as a reaction to a change in human behavior, as do hundreds of other similar verses throughout the Bible. For example, when Adam and Eve chose to disobey God, He responded by sending them out of the garden. This responsiveness would contradict God's sovereignty only if sovereignty is defined such that God cannot ever respond. The idea that God is incapable of responding arose in human philosophy, not in the Bible.

things got worse: Gomer deserted Hosea and moved in with another man. What should Hosea do? Should he divorce Gomer? She deserved it. But he still loved her. What an awful dilemma! God settled the problem for Hosea by telling him to go, pay the price of a slave to buy Gomer, and take her home as his wife again. What amazing love! What an amazing picture of redemption!

But the story of Hosea and Gomer's marriage had a deeper meaning. Their marriage represented God's relationship with Israel, His covenant people (Hosea 3:1). God loved Israel but she had turned to worshipping other gods. Throughout the book of Hosea we read of God's mixed emotions: what should He do with His unfaithful people? On the one hand, God rejected their sinfulness. In Hosea 9:15-16 He declared, "Because of all their wickedness...I hated them.... Because of their sinful deeds, I will drive them out of my house." God was ready to divorce His chosen people! But then He calls out,

How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? ... My heart is changed within Me; all My compassion is aroused. I will not carry out my fierce anger, nor will I turn and devastate Ephraim. For I am God and not man—the Holy One among you. I will not come in wrath. (Hosea 11:8-9)

In these two passages we clearly see the conditional side of God's love for Israel. In the end God's mercy won out, His covenantal love overcame His conditional hatred. He decided to redeem Israel and bring her back to Himself. God feels mixed emotions, but His character does not change. God's love is pure; His hatred is always a mixed emotion.

A third observation is that God's hatred is temporary. If the behavior that drew His hatred stops, He no longer hates. However, the temporary condition of God's hatred can become permanent. The separation between us and God due to sin can extend on into eternity unless the breach can be repaired.

That leads me to my final observation: it is possible for us to move from God's conditional hatred to His conditional love. How? The Bible describes two ways. The first way to leave God's hatred is to stop doing the things that He hates! In Isaiah 1:16-17 God declares, "Stop doing wrong, learn to do right!" In other words, repent! While I acknowledge that God's command that I stop sinning is right, I also acknowledge that I cannot do this. I fail every time I try. My sin dooms me to continuously offend a holy God thus keeping me separated from Him and His love ... unless there is another way.

Fortunately, God's love has made another way: forgiveness. We spoke last week about His saving-love that reaches out to sinners through His Son. In Christ, we are completely forgiven. In Christ, there is no sin left for God to hate. You may have noticed that the references to God's hating sin are completely missing from the New Testament. This is not because the God of the Old Testament is mean and the God of the New Testament is nice. The only change between the testaments is that God sent His Son. At the cross where Jesus died the love of God and the hate of God are both satisfied. Before coming to the cross we all experience God's conditional love-hate. After the cross, for Christians, there is only God's love.

This is not to say that God no longer cares if Christians sin, He certainly does. God disciplines His children to become holy as He is holy, just as our earthly fathers disciplined us to adopt their standards. But God's discipline is an expression of His love, not hate.

So, have we reconciled God's loving character with these six biblical references to His hate? Remember these truths: God's love is absolute and His hate is conditional. His love is pure; His hate is a mixed emotion. His love is eternal, His hate is temporary. And especially remember this: in Christ there is no more hate, only His love.

As I conclude I have to admit that I enjoyed last week's sermon on love more than this one on hate. Love is grand, hate is not! But there are two things we can learn from these few verses about God's hatred. First we learn that God takes sin seriously. So should we. God hates sin. Since my sin offends the God I love, I ought to turn from it. Jesus said, "If you love Me you will keep my commandments" (John 14:15).

The second thing I learn from these verses about God's hatred is just how amazing His love really is! Just imagine, if we were really offended by someone, if we abhorred their behavior, how hard would it be to continue to love them? As I say this I think of Phillip Garrido, the man who has been in the news recently for abducting an eleven year old girl and imprisoning her in his backyard for eighteen years, raping her, and having two children by her. His behavior abhors me. I feel no pity. I want justice, not mercy. When I feel the depth of that anger against sin and the sinner, I experience a little of the depth of anger God feels toward sin. Only then can I understand how much God's love had to overcome to send Jesus to die for Phillip Garrido. But God did send His Son to die for him—and for me!

This is the good news of the gospel! God's love is even more amazing! Even though He detests the things we do, He still sent His Son to pay the price of our slavery, to bring us home again. God's amazing grace ought to lead us to amazing gratitude.