

It's a Love-Hate Thing

February 7, 2021 | Romans 12:9

Overview

“Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.” That’s a hard verse for modern people. We have no moral consensus on what good and evil are, or even if they exist in any absolute sense. But love and hate? We feel deeply about those. We *love* Love. We *hate* Hate. There is nothing worse in our world than being a hater. Yet Romans 12:9 says genuine love involves hate. In fact, it’s the first word!

It’s a hard saying, but we can come to grips with it. Our renewed minds can know and affirm God’s “good, pleasing, and perfect” will (Rom. 12:2). We can sense what is **good** (morally sound), **pleasing** (aesthetically beautiful), and **perfect** (having a noble *telos* or end goal). So let’s take each phrase of Romans 12:9 in reverse order:

Clinging to what is good

There is such a thing as good because there is such a thing as God. He is its standard and definition. All God’s works are very good (Gen. 1:31); every good gift comes from him (James 1:17); and every good quality—the true, noble, right, pure, lovely, and admirable—reflects him (Phil. 4:8).

Our calling is to cling to that—a strong word that Paul uses elsewhere only for sex. (We also see it in Genesis 2: “A man will leave his father and mother and cling to his wife.”) In other words, we’re to marry goodness and be intimate with it.

Hating what is evil

There is such a thing as evil because there is such a thing as us. Human beings. God’s image-bearers. But rather than reflecting and extending his goodness, we rebelled. We fell short of God’s glory and destroyed Creation’s shalom. God hates that—as he should. Wrath and hate are the flipside of his love. His mighty heart is powerfully for righteousness; therefore it is decidedly against evil.

People who love God cultivate the same sensibilities. “Do I not hate those who hate you?” (Ps. 139:21). Not that we hate people per se. We’re called to love everyone, including our enemies. But it’s not so simple as “Love the sinner, hate the sin.” Sin and sinners are not so easily separated. Sin is bound up in our sinful hearts. So even when we show mercy to fellow sinners, it is mixed with a humility that recognizes our own weakness, and a fear that “hates even the clothing touched by sinful flesh” (Jude 23).

Love must be sincere

The opening phrase is literally: “The love unhyphocritical.” No verb. Just love pure and genuine. Love that doesn’t wear a mask like an actor, but is the same inside and out. We’re always striving for this, refining our hearts through the Word and prayer; obeying our best impulses, and always looking to Jesus. He is the only unhyphocritical lover. His cross is where perfect love and hate meet.

God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son.

And God so hated evil that he gave his only begotten Son.



Our Transformed Life
Living the Vision of Romans 12

Discussion Guide

1. According to Romans 12:9, unhypocritical love does two things: It hates what is evil and clings to what is good.
 - Are you leery of making any connections between love and hate? (Your pastor is.)
 - How do you begin to resolve this tension?
 - Can you think of any personal examples of when you loved and hated at the same time?
2. Read the famous and much-loved Psalm 139.
 - What do you love about the first 18 verses?
 - What do you make of verse 19-22? Are these legitimate sentiments?
 - How do the last two verses, 23-24, tie in?
 - How does this passage shed light on Romans 12:9?
3. When you encounter sin and evil, whether in yourself or in the world, do you “hate” and “abhor” it? What words might more accurately describe your response? What does this say about you?
4. It would seem our moral gauges just aren’t as sensitive as God’s, nor are our moral wells as deep. We just don’t feel like he does. We neither love nor hate like him.
 - What are some things you see Christians hating too little? Hating too much?
 - What are some things you see Christians loving too little? Loving too much?
5. Think about the experience of Francis of Assisi who, prompted by God, embraced a leper—and then changed the world. He felt God saying to him:

“Francis, all those things that you have loved in the flesh you must now despise, and from those things which you formerly loathed you will drink great sweetness and immeasurable delight.”

 - Have you ever had an experience in any way akin to this? A sense of calling or an opportunity that enabled you to love sincerely by *clinging* to what is good?
 - Has God ever filled you with a righteous indignation that enabled you to love sincerely by *hating what is evil* and then doing something about it?
6. How could we apply Romans 12:9 in a way that is positive and helpful; that enhances *Our Transformed Life* together? What would be some pitfalls to avoid in applying this text?
7. What’s one bottom-line take-away from this study for you?

“The grand point is not to wear the garb or use the speech of religion, but to possess the life of God within, and to feel and think as Jesus did because of that inner life.”

C.H. Spurgeon