

Hate Crimes

Ake Green, a Pentecostal pastor in Sweden, was arrested a year ago for violating the Swedish Hate Crimes Law by preaching that homosexuality is a sin. He was tried and convicted. He appealed to the Swedish Supreme Court, who also found him guilty, but acquitted him on the grounds that, under current European Union law, he would be found innocent. (Which causes me to ask, “Whose country is it?)

Could that happen here? We have a federal Hate Crimes Law. The owners of Sweet Cakes by Melissa in Oregon knows it can happen. They had to pay a lesbian couple over \$136,000 for refusing to bake them a wedding cake because they said, by doing so, they felt they would be participating in a religious act with which they didn’t approve. Interestingly, a pastor in Arizona recently went into a bakery owned by a gay couple and asked for a cake with an anti-gay Bible verse on it and when they refused, the pastor was arrested for instigating a hateful environment. ¹ Anybody see a problem here?

In our text today, Jesus speaks the word “hate” six times. This is neither a popular nor a comfortable passage. Some of you are wondering why we even need to study it. I’ll tell you why – because if Jesus taught it, we need to understand it and obey it if we call ourselves believers! So first, let’s...

I. Understand It.

What is this passage saying? The Greek word for hate is *misei*. It literally means ‘to detest, abhor or to have such an aversion to something that you reject it completely.’ Now, as Christians, we know that Jesus taught about hate. He said:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven....” (Matt. 5:43-45a)

So, according to this teaching, aren’t we obliged to reject all and every form of hatred?

Let’s be careful here. First of all, Jesus is speaking about one specific kind of hatred - hatred toward people. There’s an old saying that encapsulates this biblical principle. Most of you probably know it. It says that we are to, “love the person, but hate the sin.” Right?

But a second question is this - are there any other targets of hatred other than people? The answer is, “Yes, there are.” As the old saying points out, sin is a legitimate target of hatred. In fact, it should be a PRIMARY target of your hatred. Are you aware that sin is a primary target of God’s hatred? And yes, God hates! God is an active hater of sin today. Here’s the proof...

Ps. 45:7 You (God) love righteousness and hate wickedness...

Jeremiah 44:2-4 “This is what the LORD Almighty, the God of Israel, says:... ‘They provoked me to anger by burning incense and by worshiping other gods...’ ‘Do not do this detestable thing that I hate!’”

Zech. 8:17 “...do not plot evil against your neighbor, and do not love to swear falsely. I hate all this,” declares the LORD.

So, God is actively “hating” today. What does He hate? He hates sin and evil.

So, if God hates something, shouldn't we also hate it? Yes, we should. Listen...

Ps. 97:10 **Let those who love the LORD hate evil...**

Prov. 13:5 **The righteous hate what is false...**

Rom. 12:9 **Hate what is evil; cling to what is good.**

So, in God's ethical system (which is the only ethical system that a nation should build its laws upon), it's not a question of whether a person should be allowed to hate or not. No, hatred is necessary because without a hatred of evil, the good cannot reign. This is what God warned the nation of Israel about through the prophets. Jeremiah said:

Why has the land been ruined and laid waste like a desert...? The LORD said, "It is because they have forsaken my law, which I set before them; they have not obeyed me or followed my law." (Jer. 9:12b-13)

In other words, they didn't hate what God hated or loved what He loved.

Do you see what this means? It means that the cause of our problems today, problems like drugs and divorce and pornography and greed; the cause isn't that people just don't love the right things. That's only half the problem. The deeper half is that they don't hate what God hates. They don't hate greed and self-centeredness and falsehood. **Until we hate sin as God does, we will always be in danger of loving sin.** So, how we deal with that danger? In other words...

II. How Can We Love and Hate Like Jesus?

In Romans 1 to 3, Paul is explaining the root of our problem and its solution. I read a sermon this week by John Piper that helped me to see this in a new way. Piper points out that Jesus and Paul both teach that there are layers to sin. Our actions are surface sins which have a much deeper root. Jesus speaks of this, for example, and says that even before a man commits physical adultery with a woman, by looking at her in lust he has committed the first layer of sin in his heart (Matt. 5:27-30). Sinful thoughts lead to sinful actions. So, if we want to stop sin, if we want to prevent sin, we've got to dig down to the root.

Have you ever wondered this about yourself? Have you ever asked, "What's wrong with me? What's the root cause of my sin? Why do I desire it?" This is what Paul is explaining in Rom. 1. First, he says, sin causes people to **suppress the truth.**

The wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness... (Rom. 1:18)

Jesus said that we are guilty not because we are victims of the darkness but because we are lovers of the darkness. (John 3:19)

"...Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light..."

Now, what truth in particular, does sin suppress? Back to Rom. 1:19:

...what may be known about God is plain to them, because God has made it plain to them.

So, men suppressed the truth of the **knowledge of God.** Knowledge of God is repulsive to the sin-controlled mind. And when we suppress the knowledge of God, what's the result of that? Rom. 1:21:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him...

So, do you see the size of this root-ball of sin? Sin suppresses what is true about God and, therefore, hates glorifying God and thanking God. But sin isn't just a hater. It's also a lover.

Here's the principle: if you hate the wrong thing, you will love the wrong thing. What does sin love? It loves the lie. Which lie specifically? (Rom.1: 22, 23 NASB):

Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and [creation: birds, animals, etc.]

Piper then summarizes with this statement:

*The impurities of active sinning have a root. And the root is this: Sin hates the truth of God, suppresses it, and exchanges it for what sin loves and worships. Sin loves to worship and serve the creature not the Creator. That's the root of sinning.*²

Why are there so many award shows on TV? Why do we love to take "selfies"? When people give millions of dollars to a hospital, why do they insist that it be named after themselves? These are not expressions of a healthy self-image, they are a demonstration of the root cause of all evil in the world. We love to worship ourselves! And far from being healthy, this is the root cause of all forms of trouble in any society. Listen again to Rom. 1:

...since they did not think it worthwhile to retain the knowledge of God, he gave them over to a depraved mind, to do what ought not to be done... envy, murder, strife, deceit... gossips, slanderers, God-haters... senseless, faithless, heartless, ruthless. Although they know God's righteous decree that those who do such things deserve death, they not only continue to do these very things but also approve of those who practice them. (Rom.1:28-32)

Now, what, if anything, can be done about this? I listed four prevailing sins that are causing huge problems in our society earlier – addiction, divorce, pornography and greed. These, along with other sins, are ripping our culture apart. How can we stop them? How can we mend the damage they've already done?

Each sin has a spiritual root and each of us, according to Rom. 3:23, carries that root within us. But, if the majority of people in this country chose to ask Jesus to dig out their sinful root, all four of these besetting sins would dry up to nearly nothing. Do you realize that?

Let me give you some examples: what's the most effective drug treatment program in New England? It's Youth Challenge right here in Hartford! Why? Because as one recovered addict told me when I visited the facility a few years ago, he said, "It's Jesus in the morning, Jesus at noon and Jesus all night long!"

The same is true for divorce. I've had Christians tell me that the reason they were divorcing was because they "just didn't love each other anymore." No, that's not the root cause! The real reason they're divorcing is because they stopped hating what God hates! Malachi 2 says that God hates divorce and if you break your vow of marriage, he will not listen to your prayers! Do you realize that if you divorce your spouse, you're also divorcing God? If you loved God, you would also hate divorce and pornography and greed and every other sin.

So, how can we acquire not just God's love but also His holy hatred of sin? Well, we can't do it by ourselves, we can't do it without the help Jesus promised. At the end of John 15, Jesus tells us that in this world we will not win awards or prizes or accolades. Why? Because we don't belong to the world, we belong to Him. Jesus told us straight out:

"If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first."

"...If they persecuted me, they will persecute you also..."

"They will put you out of the synagogue; in fact, a time is coming when anyone who kills you will think he is offering a service to God." (John 15:18,20; 16:2)

This, of course, is happening right now in the age in which we live, isn't it? If you are a Christian, ISIS says they will kill you as an offering to their god. And Jesus tells us their motivation...

"They will do such things because they have not known the Father or me." (Jn. 16:3)

How can we love and hate like Jesus? Daily we need to be filled with His Spirit. Finally...

III. But What Do I Do When I Am Hated?

So, as followers of Christ, we must love what God loves and hate what God hates. And then Jesus also said:

"...As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world. That is why the world hates you." (John 15:19b)

So, we're going to be hated. How are we to respond? Well, Jesus both told us and showed us how we should respond to hatred and persecution:

"You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. And if someone want to sue you and take your tunic, let him have your cloak as well. If someone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. Give to the one who asks you and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you." (Matt. 5:38-42, NIV)

And the very next thing Jesus said, is so critical. I'm reading this from the translation, *The Message*:

"You're familiar with the old written law, 'Love your friend,' and its unwritten companion, 'Hate your enemy.' I'm challenging that. I'm telling you to love your enemies. Let them bring out the best in you, not the worst. When someone gives you a hard time, respond with the energies of prayer, for then you are working out of your true selves, your God-created selves. This is what God does. He gives his best – the sun to warm and the rain to nourish – to everyone, regardless: the good and bad, the nice and nasty. If all you do is love the lovable, do you expect a bonus? Anybody can do that. If you simply say hello to those who greet you, do you expect a medal? Any run-of-the-mill sinner does that.

In a word, what I'm saying is, *Grow up*. You're kingdom subjects. Now live like it. Live out your God-created identity. Live generously and graciously towards others, the way God lives toward you." (Matt. 5:43-48, The Message)

Jesus was the recipient of incredible hatred, abuse and violence. All of which He declared here in John 15, as being unjustified:

"...But now they have seen these miracles, and yet they have hated both me and my Father. But this is to fulfill what is written in their law: 'They hated me without reason.'" (John 15:24b, 25)

So, this week, when you are 'hated without reason,' how will you respond – lawyer up and sue 'em? And if not, where will you get the strength to not hate them in return?

Bible College professor Yohanna Katanacho pastored a small church in the Israeli city of Jerusalem. Can you imagine a more stressful job than being caught between the hatred of Arabs for Jews and Jews for Arabs? Both groups hated him! He constantly faced harassment, especially from Israeli soldiers. They would routinely stop him, search him and detain him, sometimes for hours. Because of the frequency of Palestinian bombings, Israeli soldiers have the legal right to shoot Palestinians if they make one false move.

But as a Christian, Yohanna sincerely wanted to obey Christ's command to 'love your enemies.' At first, he tried to love by 'self-effort.' It didn't work. He told God, "I can't do this! I'm just not feeling it." Then, from his study of God's Word, he realized that obedience isn't primarily an emotion, but a decision. He decided to show love, no matter how mechanical it felt. He found a flyer, written in Hebrew and English, with a quotation from Isaiah 53 and the words "Real Love" across the top. He made copies. Every time a soldier stopped him, he handed him both his ID and the flyer. Because the quote was in Hebrew from the Hebrew Scriptures, the soldier usually asked him about it before letting him go.

After several months of 'obeying this decision,' Yohanna suddenly noticed something about himself. His 'feelings' toward the soldiers had changed. "I was surprised," he said. "It was a process, but... my older feelings were not there anymore. I would pass in the same street, see the same soldiers as before, but now find myself praying, 'Lord, let them stop me, so that I can share with them the love of Christ.'"³

Jesus said:

"All this I have told you so that you will not go astray." (John 16:1)

This is His deepest desire – that nothing will stop us from being a light in this world that shines a spotlight on who He really is – the One who allowed hate to kill Him so that He, one day, could kill hate. Will you join Him this week in His holy mission? Let's pray...

¹ KGW News, "Sweet Cakes by Melissa pays \$135,000 fine," Dec. 28, 2015 and Right Wing News, "Pastor Who Asked 'Gay' Bakery for a Christian Cake Being Charged with a Crime," Warner Todd Huston, April 2015.

² John Piper, "What is Sin? The Essence and Root of All Sinning," Plenary Session – 2015 Conference for Pastors, Feb. 2, 2015

³ "When Love is Impossible," Trinity Magazine (Fall 2005), p. 16-17