

Did Jesus Tell Us To Hate People?

Everyone knows, or should know, that God is love, 1 John 4:8, 16. Jesus noted that the Jews had been taught to hate their enemy, but he added, *“but I say unto you, love your enemies, and pray for them that persecute you;”* Matthew 5:44.

If this is so, then why did Jesus say, *“If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.”* Luke 14:26? There appears to be a contradiction. How can the God of love have a Son, who said he spoke the will of the Father, tell people to love their enemies and hate their family and even their own life?

How can the God of love say, *“I have loved you, saith Jehovah. Yet ye say, Wherein hast thou loved us? Was not Esau Jacob’s brother, saith Jehovah: yet I loved Jacob; but Esau I hated, and made his mountains a desolation, and (gave) his heritage to the jackals of the wilderness.”* Malachi 1:2-3?

Jesus’ teaching, and God’s statement, as recorded in the Bible, look as if they are contradictory. Many critics look for such apparent contradictions in order to ridicule the Bible. They want to give people the idea that the Bible is untrustworthy. Bible proponents claim the book is in harmony with itself, Yet in these passages as well as others the critics claim there are contradictions that proves the Bible cannot be a divinely given book. Therefore the Bible should not be viewed as authoritative in controlling and shaping our moral lives.

Are the Bible critics right? Reflexively we say NO! But what do we base that answer upon? What explanation can be offered to explain these passages as not conflicting with the rest of the Bible? This article will provide evidence to show that neither the Father nor the Son are speaking out of both sides of their mouths, as maintained by today’s critics and scoffers.

First we need to recognize and admit that in many Bible passages the Hebrew and Greek words translated “hate” (and its grammatical variants) mean exactly what the English word “hate” means to us today. Specifically, the word “hate” means, “to have a strong aversion to, *hate, detest*” according to BDAG.¹ Parkhurst defines the word simply, “to reject with disgust.”²

Scripture gives us many examples where this meaning is used. *“Neither shalt thou set thee up a pillar; which Jehovah thy God hateth.”* (regarding idolatry) Deuteronomy 16:22; *“He who hates disguises it with his lips, But he lays up deceit in his heart.”* Proverbs 26:24; *“Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you (from their company), and reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man’s sake.”* Luke 6:22.

God instructs us not to hate, *“Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.”* 1 John 3:15; *“Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thy heart: thou shalt surely rebuke thy neighbor, and not bear sin because of him.”* Leviticus 19:17.

How then can the Father and the Son say what they have said, as noted in the opening paragraphs of this article? This becomes even more a question when the Apostle Paul, in Romans 9:13, quotes Malachi 1:2-3 as he explains how the Gentile became eligible to become a child of God. It appears as if Paul, inspired by the Holy Spirit, confirms that God hated Esau.

As I stated before, one must view scripture in context when a difficult passage occurs, if a correct understanding of that passage is to be had. It is no different with Romans 9:13 and Malachi 1:2-3.

Before we get to the context of the apparent contradictory passages, let us return to the lexicons for a moment. Both lexicons, previously referenced, have a second definition for the word translated "hate" (other lexicons do too). BDAG continues, "to be disinclined to, disfavor, disregard in contrast to preferential treatment."³ Parkhurst follows with, "to hate, comparatively, to postpone in love or esteem."⁴ Vine offers a lengthier definition that may help with the understanding, "of relative preference for one thing over another, by way of expressing either aversion from, or disregard for, the claims of one person or thing relatively to those of another."⁵

The words hate and love in certain instances are used in *hyperbole*. The importance of a comparative difference between two thoughts is emphasized by exaggerating that difference, in this case, through the use of very strong words meaning the opposite of each other.

While not unheard of in more western cultures, this sort of word use was not at all unusual for the Oriental of the ancient world. Kittel notes that the alternative use of the word hate (and in several Bible passages, its counterpart, love) is a *Hebraism*.⁶ In other words a figure of speech used by the Hebrew people.

Let us consider several verses to see how both definition and context show that only comparative thought is in view; not the actual hate of that which is not worthy of such. First let's look at Jacob and Esau. The context occurs over separate passages. In Genesis, we read of God telling Rebekah about her twins, "*And Jehovah said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, And two peoples shall be separated from thy bowels. And the one people shall be stronger than the other people. And the elder shall serve the younger.*" Genesis 25:23. As we continue reading Genesis we see the rivalry between the twins, Jacob and Esau, with Jacob ultimately prevailing.

God's promise was fulfilled when the younger Jacob received their father's, Isaac, blessing. Jacob's progeny produced Israel while the elder Esau fathered the nation of Edom. Israel later ruled over Edom, thus the elder served the younger.

This was God's will that was spoken before either child was born, so God's plan was not predicated upon the life activities of either Jacob or Esau. Jacob was the child of promise from Abraham through Isaac (and not Ishmael).

This is God's point to the Jews in Malachi's day. When God said "*yet I loved Jacob, but Esau I hated...*" It was this preference for Jacob as the heir of promise over the firstborn, Esau. It is in this verse that a Hebraism was employed. God loved (preferred) Jacob

and hated (averted or disregarded) Esau. It would appear highly unlikely that God would bless Esau with fathering a nation if he truly hated him in the conventional sense of the word as we use it today.

Long after Esau died, his people's behavior toward Israel led to God making *"their mountains a desolation."* Malachi 1:2-3.

Paul reiterates God's promise to Rebekah and Malachi's prophecy, Romans 9:12-13. Paul demonstrates God's righteousness in calling the Gentile as well as the Jew. The case of Jacob and Esau is used to illustrate this. It is only through the context of the entire ninth chapter that one can understand Paul's use of this example. In case one thought God was unfair to Esau and hated him in unrighteously, Paul answers, *"What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid."* Romans 9:14.

Our next example is found in Luke 14:26, *"If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple."* It is this last phrase that is the key to understanding that Jesus is using a Hebraism and not speaking literally.

The subject is discipleship and its requirements of mankind; total devotion. Jesus already dealt with this in his Sermon on the Mount, *"No man can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon."* Matthew 6:24.

Jesus is not telling us to hate our boss (cf. Colossians 3:22). Rather, that if we attempt to serve two bosses, we will ultimately prefer one over the other and give the preferred one our true service. Jesus is making a spiritual application on discipleship by using this common sense example. The figure of speech of love and hate for preference emphasized the point.

So it is in the Luke passage, above. If one is not willing to place Jesus first, even over family and self, then he is not worthy to be a disciple of Jesus. As you finish reading the chapter you readily see Jesus reiterating his point with different examples and teaching on the necessity of counting the cost of discipleship before one enters into such a relationship.

Jesus taught the honoring of one's parents and scathingly rebuked those that only paid lip service to the concept. Paul went to great length using the love of a husband for his wife to illustrate Christ's love for the church, Ephesians 5:22-33. In this passage, Paul acknowledges as fact that man does not hate himself, v. 29. It is this very fact that Paul uses, in part, to make his point in this passage.

Paul then begins a new section on children obeying and honoring their parents, followed by instruction to fathers to not provoke their children to wrath, but in fact love them, Ephesians 6:1-4.

There are other passages in the Bible where this understanding of the word "hate" being used as a figure of speech is found. Deuteronomy 21:15-17 and Genesis 29:30-31

(in the context of chapters 29 and 30) are two excellent examples. However, space to continue has run out.

Taking the time to examine the Bible through lexicons and just reading the texts demonstrates that God, through either the Father, Son or Holy Ghost is not telling us to hate our families and ourselves. Rather, we are to love God first and foremost. Everything else is secondary. That does not mean ignored or despised.

There is ample reason to be confident that our Bible is in harmony with itself. The claims of the scoffers and critics can be answered. This “contradiction” of the Bible is as non-existent as the others that are claimed.

1. Bauer, Danker, Arndt and Gingrich, A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and other Early Christian Literature, 3rd ed., Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000. pp.652-653
2. Parkhurst, John, A Greek and English Lexicon to the New Testament, London: 1769. p. 379
3. BDAG, *loc cit.*
4. Parkhurst, *loc cit.*
5. Vine, W. E., An Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words, Vol. 2, Old Tappan, New Jersey: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1966. p. 198
6. Kittel, Gerhard and Friedrich, Gerhard, Theological Dictionary Of The New Testament, Vol. 4, Grand Rapids: Erdmans, 1993. p. 690