

A Love/Hate Relationship  
First Reading - Deuteronomy 30:15-20  
Second Reading - Luke 14:25-33

Hey, we're spinning the hits all morning long here on SMPCXM radio at channel 8601 on the Bryant Farms Network. So kick up the volume, tune in your minds, and stir those hearts to action as we open this next set with #5 on the all-time hit list - *"Honor your father and mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you."* That's from the Exodus 20 album on the Mosaic label. Next, we'll cue up a string of favorites including off the Proverbs LP — *"Hatred stirs up strife, but love covers all offenses."* Then we'll spin the searing social commentary from 1 John's studio album — *"Everyone who hates his brother is a murderer, and you know that no murderer has eternal life abiding in him."*

Dropping next will be the brooding ballad from a subsequent Proverbs recording — *"Whoever hates disguises himself with his lips and harbors deceit in his heart; when he speaks graciously, believe him not."* Seems like that song was written for Tammy Wynette, God rest her soul. Then we'll lighten things up with a popular medley, a mash-up of real fan favorites including that band out of Corinth — *"Love is patient and kind"*; and from the Romans' greatest hits — *"Let love be genuine"*; which then crescendos into the peace

anthem from the lips of the Master himself — *“Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.”*

Talk about a lyric that will reframe your day. The medley continues with 1 John’s breakout hit — *“We love because he first loved us. If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”* Love’s in the air, folks. Can you feel it?

We’ll round out our love fest with this bonus track from Luke — *“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple...”* Wait ... What? Who put that in here? That’s like advertising a double feature matching *The Sound of Music* with *Nightmare on Elm Street*. What’s going on here? Imagine someone new to the Bible, reading from Genesis forward. Now, over halfway through Luke, he’s finally starting to get it — Love, love, love, love, love... (there’s a theme here) ... Love, love, love, hate, love, love... Wait a minute! Is Jesus pranking us or perhaps auditioning for an appearance on *Sesame Street*?

One of these things is not like the others,  
One of these things just doesn't belong...

Honor your father and your mother ... Whoever hates his brother is in the darkness ... We know that we have passed from death to life because we love one another. Whoever does not love abides in death ... Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple...

Did Luke's typesetter reach for the wrong word or was his editor distracted when copyediting the manuscript? I read this text and thought — Surely the Greek will help clear up what is so obviously a mistranslation. Like English, Greek words can carry more than one meaning. Maybe the translator was just having a bad day and picked the darker definition. So, I looked it up to clear it up, hoping to avoid having to rationalize an endorsement of all that the Bible condemns. So, what does the Greek reveal? *Miseo* is the Greek word here, and according to the Greek lexicon, *Miseo* can carry these three shades of meaning — *to hate; to pursue with hatred; to detest*. Well, that's not helpful ... at all.

*“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple...”*

Hmmmm! Back in Genesis 1 we read — *“God saw everything that he had*

*made, and indeed, it was very good.” In John 15, Jesus says, “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. I have said these things to you so that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be complete. This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you.”*

So, how are we to work through this contradiction? First, I am reminded of the wisdom of the rabbi who said that the problem with Christians is that they read the Bible to end a conversation, whereas we read the Bible to begin a conversation. I have come to see his wisdom in that the Bible is not a tool to prove you are right, but a wondrous ongoing conversation between the Divine and God's children. Sometimes, many times, our growth in faith is not so much about finding an answer as it is about wrestling with the question.

Perhaps Jesus, and even more so, Luke, want the listener, the reader to wrestle with the very nature of relationship, that wide continuum between love and hate. All the relationships you have are there, and the pictorial directory in your brain reveals faces all across that love/hate continuum. And here's the crazy thing, the faces along that continuum are

not static. They are regularly shifting back and forth, back and forth, sometimes subtly, sometimes wildly. While I was huffing away on an elliptical machine at the Y this week, I watched a documentary on Crosby, Stills, Nash, and Young, and appearances aside, those dudes must have been in decent shape because they were perpetually sprinting back and forth between love and hate. They're together, then they split. There's a reunion. No there isn't. Two record an album leaving the others out. Then the other two record an album and start a tour, actually taking the voices of the first two out of the recording, but then, just as the tour gets going, Neil Young spontaneously bolts, leaving nothing for Stephen Stills but a brief note, saying — "Dear Stephen, funny how things that start spontaneously end that way. Eat a peach" You needed a GPS to keep up with where they were on the continuum.

Love/hate, hate/love. It reminded me of an old Seinfeld episode where two characters, Elaine and Puddy, broke up and got back together on a single airline flight. Now, some here will boldly claim — *I regard everybody the same!* ...or, *I love everybody equally* ... No, you don't. You are human, and thus part of the fallen mass of humanity plagued by the infection of self-interest, fickle emotions, shifting moods, intrusive insecurities,

unexpected revelations, unholy alliances, trending loyalties, and vulnerable egos. People will compliment you on how balanced you seem, how loving your family appears, but peel back a couple of layers and if a storm isn't already raging, there is probably a tropical depression or two brewing out in the Atlantic. I am sure that in the crowd following Jesus, more than a few of them heard the words — *Hate father, mother, sister, brother* — and thought, “*Well heck, I was going to do that anyway.*”

The glossy family portrait framed above the mantel, inserted in the campaign ad, included in the church directory, or mailed as a Christmas card rarely tells the whole story. It's far more complicated than what the smiles convey. Love and hate are not dualistic. With love and hate we are closer to the mark when we think of them in terms of both/and instead of either/or.

And thus, even in the best of circumstances, love is hard. Relationships are hard. And so, we continue to value the classical prayer of the church — “*We have followed too much the devices and desires of our own hearts ... We have left undone those things which we ought to have done; And we have done those things which we ought not to have done.*”

I have probably mentioned to you before the counsel I often offer to couples preparing for a wedding — *You are preparing to make promises that neither of you are equipped to keep. So why are we proceeding?*

The answer to that question, I believe, is the clue to understanding the seemingly irreconcilable connection between the Jesus revealed in the Gospels and the disturbing demands he places before potential disciples in this text. In 1 John, it says, *“God is love, and those who abide in love abide in God, and God abides in them ... We love, because he first loved us.”* And, in 2 Corinthians 5, Paul states — *“So if anyone is in Christ, there is a new creation: everything old has passed away; see, everything has become new! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ, and has given us the ministry of reconciliation.*

Christ has done for us that which we cannot do for ourselves, and Christ equips us to do that which we cannot do alone, namely the practice of self-giving love. And thus, Jesus says in John 5 — *“I am the vine; you are the branches. The one who remains in me and I in him produces much fruit, because you can do nothing without me.”*

Back to the love/hate continuum, the reason Jesus can say —  
*“Whoever comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and even life itself, cannot be my disciple.”* — is because the God who knows us better than we know ourselves understands that if Jesus is not to our left on the continuum between love and hate, pulling us toward love, the powers that drive hate face far less resistance in pulling us back from love.

I don’t care how strong you are, we do not possess the power to resist the gravity that would drag us in the direction of hate. Paul puts it this way — *“I can will what is right, but I cannot do it. For I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I that do it, but sin that dwells within me ... Wretched man that I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death? Thanks be to God through Jesus Christ our Lord!”*

Martin Luther echoed this in the great — *“If we in our own strength confide; our striving would be losing.”*

Jesus isn’t asking you to detest anyone. On the contrary, Jesus is saying — *If you want to love father, mother, sister, brother, life itself, then you*



*had better keep me before you, pulling you toward love, because, I know you, and you just won't get there on your own.*

Could it be that the essence of Jesus' warning and counsel to the crowds can be heard in the words of St. Patrick's prayer — "Christ be with me, Christ within me, Christ behind me, Christ before me, Christ beside me, Christ to win me, Christ to comfort and restore me." Amen.