

How to Think Biblically about Love and Hate

An Informal Study by Douglas Van Dorn
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"It is our duty to hate, in the sinner, his being a sinner, and to love in him, his being a man capable of bliss. And this is to love him truly, out of charity, for God's sake."

~ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theologica*, II-II, 25, 6

Misunderstanding Love and Hate

Some have problems understanding how God could hate anyone.

- “Love the sinner, but hate the sin.” (you can’t hate the sinner, just the sin)
- “Love the sin (i.e. homosexuality), or you aren’t loving the sinner.”
- And by no means could we tolerate a statement like, "All virtuous people MUST hate the wicked."

Some have problems understanding how God could love everyone.

- As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated" (Rom 9:13 ESV). “God does not love him ‘cuz he does not love the wicked see psalms 5:5; 7:11; 11:5.” God couldn’t both love and hate them, because that would mean he is confused and unable to make up his mind.
- “Common grace is not the same as love, that’s why it’s not called common love.”
- “God couldn’t love someone straight to hell.”

For both groups, there is only one kind of love and one kind of hate and they are mutually exclusive. Such hasty generalizations lead to theological problems (e.g. incorrect views of the atonement on both sides) and practical problems (e.g. how we think about and treat one another).

Parsing Love and Hate:

The greatest doctors of the church (including Augustine, Aquinas, and many Puritans)¹ understood that it is possible for God to both hate and love someone at the same time, but in different respects. In fact, it is not only possible, but necessary. Otherwise, the hatred of a thing necessarily becomes the hatred of the person or the love of a person becomes the love of the thing too. In this way, we end up calling evil good and good evil. They divided “love” and “hate” each into three sub-categories (the last in each category belongs properly only to God, while the others belong both to God and to us). These are as follows:

VARIOUS CATEGORIES:

Love of Benevolence (Good-Will). *This is a kind of love whereby a person wishes well to another, or to himself.* It is common grace where God sends the rain on the just and unjust. It is not conditioned on the nature of the person's obedience. We are to love all men as image bearers of God, so as to seek their good and to wish them well, even as God Himself does. This should very much affect how we speak about and think about others.

Love of Complacency (Delight). *This is the love that delights in the moral qualities of another person, even as a parent takes delight in an obedient child.* This is complacency in the older sense, “the fact or state of being pleased with something or someone.” This sort of love is therefore conditional. As Jesus said, “if you do X, then will my Father and I love you,” etc., etc. This is the love that should cause us to praise the actions of others.

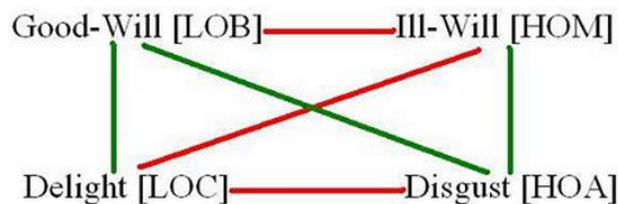
Love of Election (Saving Love). This kind of love is God’s sovereign free choice in eternity past to take any person he chooses and shower saving love upon them

¹ For example, Augustine, “The City of God,” *NPNF*, 1st series, ed by Philip Schaff (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson, 2004), 2:266; Augustine, [“Expositions on the Book of Psalms,” NPNF, 1st Series, ed. by Philip Schaff \(Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 2004\), 8:640](#) ; Aquinas, Summa II-II q.34; Henry Ainsworth, *The Old Orthodox Foundation of Religion* (London: Printed by E. Cotes, and are to be sold by Michael Spark at the Blue Bible in Green Arbour, 1653), 16-17; Nathanael Hardy, [The First General Epistle of St. John the Apostle, Unfolded and Applied \(Edinburgh: James Nichol, 1865\), 194-195](#); John Collinges, *The Intercourses of Divine Love Betwixt Christ and his Church* (London: Printed by T. Snowden, for Edward Giles Bookseller in Norwich, near the Market-place, 1683), 156; Samuel Rutherford, *The Tryal & Triumph of Faith* (London: Printed by John Field, and are to be sold by Ralph Smith, at the Sign of the Bible in Cornhill near the Royall Exchange, 1659), 398-401; Stephen Charnock, “A Discourse of God's Being the Author of Reconciliation,” in *The Works of Stephen Charnock* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1986), 3:345; Thomas Manton, From Sermon XXXIX on 2 Cor. V in *The Complete Works of Thomas Manton* (London: James Nisbet & Co., 1873), 13:298; Geerhardus Vos, [“The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God,” The Presbyterian and Reformed Review 13 \(January, 1902\), 24–25.](#) You can find these and more at my friend Tony Byrne’s blog: <http://theologicalmeditations.blogspot.com/search/label/Hate%2FLove>.

Hatred of Malice/Enmity (Ill-Will). *This hate wishes ILL to a person.* This type of hate is antithetical to all senses of love. In this sense, we are forbidden to hate any man, even as we ought not to hate ourselves in this manner, which would result in suicide and other forms of self-injury. God has no hatred of malice towards anyone. He does not delight in the death of the wicked. This kind of hatred is far too common in each of our hearts. It comes out in what we say about other people *as people*.

Hatred of Abomination (Disgust). *It is a hatred of moral disgust*, as we take into consideration the evil principles that subsist in others and ourselves. A parent may be disgusted with a child insofar as they are disobedient, but still have a love of benevolence for that child. This form of hate may rationally and virtuously co-exist with a love of benevolence, but it is antithetical to a love of complacency. This is the kind of hatred that should cause us to speak against wicked ideas, teachings, and deeds.

Hatred of Preterition (non-choosing/passing over). This kind of hatred is *God's kingly right to pass over*. It contemplates a person as a sinner in Adam, though they have not yet been born or done anything good or bad. Yet, it is not identical to the hatred of abomination, as this kind of hatred contemplates actual vice that is taking place or has taken place (not that will take place in the future).



A red line indicates incompatibility and a green line shows compatibility

The easy parts of this diagram are that you can have a love of benevolence and a love of complacency at the same time, and you can have a hatred of malice and a hatred of abomination at the same time. The harder thing to come to grips with is that you can have the love of benevolence and the hatred of abomination simultaneously. What is incompatible, however, is to have a love of any kind at the same time that you have a hatred of malice. It is incompatible, biblically speaking, I should say. But perhaps we have all been guilty of this at many points in our lives. It is a great sin to have a hatred of malice at any time. It is not a sin to have a hatred of disgust.

Two Quotes: Love the Sinner but Hate the Sin?

[Augustine](#). “These last words are not to be taken, as the words of one commanding a just man, but tolerating a weak one. And herein the law is not against the Gospel, for *Paul* says that some men are hateful unto God, and therefore **may be hated of us; but they are to be hated only in respect of their vices, and not of their persons, which are God’s creatures**; this being not understood, made the Scribes to think, that they might hate the very person of their enemies. But Christ teaches to love our enemies, setting down precepts for the perfect, unto which every faithful person ought to strive by prayer, and endeavor to attain.”

[Aquinas](#). It is our duty to hate, in the sinner, his being a sinner, and to love in him, his being a man capable of bliss. And this is to love him truly, out of charity, for God's sake.

The modern slogan that we should "love the sinner but hate the sin" is one that, at least *conceptually*, goes back to Augustine, but is not understood by many today. For him and others (i.e. [Aquinas](#), [Calvin](#), [Rutherford](#), [Jenkyn](#), [Manton](#), [Polhill](#), Mayer, etc.), this idea was the same as saying that Christians should love lost people *as creatures of God* and yet hate them *as sinners*. They may be loved and hated *at the same time but in different respects*, even as God both loves and hates the unbelieving elect *at the same time but in different respects*. "Love the sinner but hate the sin" is a distortion of the ancient truth that we are to both love the sinner and hate the sinner *at the same time but in different respects*.

Some Biblical Passages on Love and Hate

(Mat 5:43-48 ESV)

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall **love your neighbor** and **hate your enemy**.' But I say to you, **Love your enemies** and **pray for** those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven. For **he makes his sun rise** on the evil and on the good, and **sends rain** on the just and on the unjust. For if you **love** those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you **greet** only your

brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? You therefore must **be perfect**, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

(Luk 6:27-28 ESV)

"But I say to you who hear, **Love** your enemies, **do good** to those who hate you,

²⁸ **ble**ss those who curse you, **pray** for those who abuse you.

Questions:

1. *What kind of love does Jesus have in mind?* **Love of benevolence** – “going good” “blessing” “greeting” and “praying” for them.

2. *What kind of hatred did the Pharisees have in mind?* **Hatred of Malice**. They wished others ill-will. They would not do good, bless, greet, or pray for them.

3. *Is Jesus talking about hatred of abomination?* No, Jesus is not saying that we must not be disgusted at moral evil.

4. *Is the love Jesus tells us to have conditional or unconditional?*

(Gen 29:30-31 LXA)

And he went in to Rachel; and **he loved Rachel more** than Lea; and he served him seven other years. And when the Lord God saw that Lea was **hated**, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.

(Luke 14:26). "If anyone comes to me and does not **hate his own** father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and **even his own life**, he cannot be my disciple.

(Matt 10:37). Whoever **loves father or mother more than me** is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

**Putting them into the right categories:
Which category does each “love” or “hate” belong?**

Hate:

- (1Jo 4:20). 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. *Hatred of malice.*
- (John 12:25 ESV) Whoever loves his life loses it, and whoever **hates his life** in this world will keep it for eternal life. Is Jesus telling us to commit suicide? *Hatred of abomination.*
- (Luke 16:13). No servant can serve two masters, for either he will **hate the one** and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and **despise the other**. You cannot serve God and money." *Hatred of malice* (God). *Hatred of abomination* (money).
- (Pro 1:22). "How long, O simple ones, will you **love** being simple? How long will scoffers **delight** in their scoffing and fools **hate** knowledge?" *Hatred of malice.*
- (Rom 9:13). As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." *Hatred of Preterition.*
- (Psa 5:5). The boastful shall not stand before your eyes; you **hate** all evildoers. *Hatred of abomination.*
- (Psa 11:5). The LORD tests the righteous, but his soul **hates** the wicked and the one who loves violence. *Hatred of abomination.*
- (Psa 26:5 ESV). I hate the assembly of evildoers, and I will not sit with the wicked.
- PS 106:40 Therefore the LORD was angry with his people and abhorred his inheritance.

Love:

- (John 3:16). "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. *Love of Benevolence.*
- (Rom 9:13). As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." *Love of Benevolence. Electing Love.*

- (Jude 1:21). Keep yourselves in the love of God, waiting for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ that leads to eternal life. *Love of Complacency*.
- (Heb 1:9 ESV) You have **loved righteousness** and **hated wickedness**; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions." *Love of Complacency*.

What are the various ways to cultivate a love of benevolence in the heart in order to guard against any hatred or malice. I certainly need that, and I think we all do.

- Bless people
- Pray for people, especially kings and those in authority
- Give them your tunic
- Do good to them
- Do not do ill to them