

Scattering the Darkness: The Poison of Hatred

1 John 2:3-11 (NIV)

³ We know that we have come to know him if we keep his commands. ⁴ Whoever says, "I know him," but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person. ⁵ But if anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them. This is how we know we are in him: ⁶ Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did. ⁷ Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old one, which you have had since the beginning. This old command is the message you have heard. ⁸ Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining. ⁹ Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. ¹⁰ Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. ¹¹ But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

What do you hate? Woah, wait a minute, pastor. Hate is such a strong word. You sure you want to use *that* word? Maybe you just strongly dislike or don't appreciate those things. Are you sure you hate them?

Even having been cautioned against using the word "hate," there are a lot of times that this word comes out of our mouths, doesn't it? I hate the traffic jam that makes me late for where I'm going, or I hate the frustration of people driving ridiculously slow for no apparent reason. I hate onions on my pizza; they induce my gag reflex. I hate stepping in animal poop, especially knowing that it's not from my animals. I hate inflation and how expensive eggs are. I hate the toxicity on social media, that people write and say some of the worst things when behind a keyboard and a computer screen. I hate the polarizing political climate that we live in, that you have to be all in on one side or another and that there is seemingly no compromise, no collaboration, no middle ground.

Let's be honest: that word "hate" has also escaped our lips when it comes to specific people. We may hate them because they're draining, always taking, rarely, if ever, giving, they're full of drama, talk at me instead of conversing with me. I may hate someone for the insensitive words that they spoke to me, that they didn't seem to care or remember the struggles that I told them that I was going through. I may hate them because they wronged me. That specific person cut me off in traffic. They insulted me, belittled me, spread lies about me. They hit me, abused me. Maybe I hate them not because of what they did to me, but because of what they did to hurt my loved one.

And you probably know where this sermon is going. Yes, pastor, we get it. Hate is bad. We shouldn't hate ever. But before we go and label all hate as bad, let's pause to see that there are things to properly, rightly hate.

If you read through the Bible and specifically look up the word "hate" and how it's used, you'll find that there are things that God hates. He hates false teachings, false worship, hypocrisy, double-minded people, liars, dishonest gain, basically everything that is wicked, sinful, and evil. And we know that God is perfect. So, we know it's not a sin to hate these things. In fact, it is proper, godly even, to hate sin.

Yes, hate the sin, but what about hating someone in the church, hating another brother or sister in Christ who has sinned against you, wronged you, or sinned against or wronged your loved one? The Apostle John informs us on this subject as he wrote: "Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness." (verse 9) This darkness is the darkness of unbelief. To hate a brother or sister in Christ means that you are not living in the Light of God.

How can that be, pastor? They wronged me! They sinned against my loved one! What they did was wrong! And God hates sin! Don't I have every right to hate them because of what they did?!

To figure out how hating a brother or sister in Christ causes us to live in the darkness of unbelief, we have to look at what God did with the thing he hates, at what he did with sin. The themes of light and darkness permeate throughout John's letter as well as the Gospel account that he wrote. God is light. Sin, evil is darkness. God took on human flesh and came into this world all to scatter the darkness, to get rid of sin, the thing he hates. As John tells us in the verse immediately preceding our section for today: "Jesus Christ, the Righteous One, is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world." (1 John 2:2)

Like we heard last week, we know that Jesus was despised and abhorred, yet he was still the Redeemer and Holy One of Israel. Yes, he hates sin, and he hates the one who sins. But he did not hold on to his hate. Instead, he took all that sin, all that he hated, and put it on himself. He became sin for us, our sin. He died on the cross for every ounce of hate that we have ever mustered. He paid

the just price for how we have hated others, especially how we have hated other brothers and sisters in Christ. It was his blood that covered over our sin, that paid the price, that made atonement for us so that God doesn't hate us. His hatred of our sin was done away with on the cross. Justice was satisfied there and instead we were filled with Jesus' perfection. Because of Jesus' payment and his perfectly lived life for us by never hating a fellow believer, it is as if you and I have never sinned, never hated. Jesus got rid of the darkness of our hate so that we would be with him, that we would live in his light, live as he did – never hating a fellow Christian.

This helps us see why John can say to us: "But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them." (verse 11) When we hold to hating a brother or sister in Christ, we're telling God that his payment for how this person wronged me or wronged my loved one wasn't enough. We're demanding more blood, more payment, so that our hate will be satisfied.

This is not how Jesus lived, and it's not how he treats us. He does not hold on to hating us for our sins because he paid the price for them on the cross. If we're going to claim to be his followers, we have to give up the hate against our brothers and sisters in Christ. "Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did." (verse 6)

If we don't live as Jesus did, if we continue to hate a brother or sister in Christ, then we are also affect our standing with God. "Whoever says, 'I know him,' but does not do what he commands is a liar, and the truth is not in that person." (verse 4) We pray as Jesus taught us: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us." This means that with the same measure that you are forgiven of your sins by God, so we forgive the sins of others. To instead hold on to hate is telling God that he too should hold on to the hate of our sins. If we will not forgive and let go of the hate we have of a fellow Christian in light of the cross, then neither should God let go of his hate of our sin. In this way, hating a brother or sister in Christ is like you drinking a bottle of poison and expecting the other person, the person you hate, to die. It only hurts us to hate a brother or sister in Christ because they still live in the forgiveness that Christ has won; his sacrifice of atonement for their sins still stands.

So how do we scatter the darkness of our hate against our brothers and sisters in Christ? How do we get rid of the poison of hate? We go to the same place God went to take care of hate: the cross. Every time that you're reminded of what this person did to you or to your loved one, every time the black bile of hate rises up in your throat, every time your eyes want to turn into daggers and harm that person, look at the cross. See that the wrongs done against you or your loved one was nailed there, paid for there. This is where it was killed. The justice for that wrong was satisfied by Christ, by God himself, on the cross. It was paid in full for them as well as for you.

When we put our hate on the cross for the sins committed against us by our brothers and sisters in Christ, then we are living as Christ did. Then we are forgiving as God has forgiven us. Then the darkness of our hatred is scattered, and we live in the light. To live this way completes the love of God in us and in the world, as John wrote: "If anyone obeys his word, love for God is truly made complete in them." (verse 5a) God's love for us is totally complete. His desire for us is that we too live out that love, especially with our brothers and sisters in Christ, treating them as God treats us, forgiving them as God has forgiven us. This makes God's love complete among us because then we too are living it, living as Christ did.

"Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble." (verse 10) When we look at the cross and love and forgive our brother or sister in Christ and put away our hate on the cross, this is how God's love is truly made complete in our lives, in our world. Loving and forgiving keeps us in the light and scatters the darkness. Putting our hate on the cross gets rid of the poison of our hate. Amen.