

A Theology of Love and Hate

Father we come before you to declare Your Word, to be faithful to You, to honor Your name. You are transcendent, and at times You seem very far away from us. May You, by the presence of Your Holy Spirit within us, draw near to us. Lord we open today the doors of our heart and we open Your Word. We ask you to bless Your Word as food for our souls. Jesus said, "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God." And so as we open up Your Word, I pray that it will be that food for souls, nourishing and strengthening and reviving. It is Your Word that gives us revelation of who You are. We cannot know You and do not know You on our own initiative or in our own thinking. We are dependent upon Your Word. And Jesus said, "This is eternal life, that you may know the one true God and Jesus Christ whom He sent." May we know You intimately this morning by the ministry of Your Spirit working in us. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

The burden of the Word of the Lord to Israel by the hand of Malachi. I hope, I don't know that I succeeded in the first service. I hope that in some way we will feel the burden, that's what the word signifies. The heavy word of the Lord that came to Israel from the hand of Malachi, and as we saw last week, it is a word not just to Israel, but it is a word to us from the Lord. And I hope that we will feel the heaviness of it. And I'm just a guy, I'm not much into emotion and all that stuff, but feeling is not bad. Feeling is good. We should feel, especially when there's weight behind it. There's things that are true and real, and you should feel that. The problem is when we feel and there's nothing behind it, there's no weight. So I want us to sense the weight and feel the weight of this message this morning.

We're talking about, I don't know is it a stretch to say we're talking about one of the weightiest subjects that creatures can talk about? We are talking about this morning as creatures, we're talking not only about our Creator, we are talking about our Creator who chooses to love some of His creatures, and He chooses to hate other of His creatures. Is that weighty? Is there anything much more weighty than that? We've not only talking God, the God who we cannot

see, but we're saying of this God, He chooses to love some of His creatures and He chooses to hate some of His other creatures.

When you open up the book of Malachi, it's kind of like the husband that comes home from a hard day at work and he opens up the door and he gets smacked with all the problems of the day at home. Where's the, "Hi, how are you? How was your day?" You open up the prophecy of Malachi and it's just, smack! "I've loved you." "How have You loved us?" "I chose you, I set my love on you, and I hated your brother." That's how this prophecy starts right away. We talked about this last week, we talked about it Wednesday – we've been talking about election, God choosing. Someone said, "Well how can you talk about election and this. The word election isn't even in here." Well when you read the Lord answering Israel's question, "How have You loved us," and He says, "Didn't Jacob have a brother?" "Yeah." "They're twins. Esau was even firstborn. But I loved Jacob. I hated Esau." You're talking about election. You're talking about God who says, "I chose to love Jacob and I chose to hate Esau."

How do I know that I'm not reading into this? You can turn and you probably should turn to Romans chapter 9. I'm not going to spend a great deal of times in Romans 9 because some day, Lord willing, I'm going to preach through the book of Romans. But I would be remiss I think if I didn't take us to this passage, because this is where the apostle Paul quotes Malachi, chapter 1. Paul is speaking about election, he's speaking about the remnant, those who will receive salvation, and he goes immediately to Isaac and Rebekah, verse 10, about their children. Notice what it says in verse 11. Though they were not yet born and had done nothing either good or bad, in order that God's purpose of election might continue, not because of works but because of Him who calls,

She was told the older (Esau) will serve the younger Jacob. As it is written, "Jacob I loved, but Esau I hated." For Paul, that was a proof of election. To show, as he says, so that God's purpose of election might stand. It's not about him who runs, it's not about works, it's about sovereign, free grace of God. I choose Jacob. I reject Esau.

I want us to be very careful here. I want to be very careful here. I do not in any way want to convey to you that I somehow have all the answers here, that I somehow understand completely all the mysteries of election and predestination, that I have answered all the

questions that arise. When I take this text, especially the one in Romans 9:11, they're not even born yet. They haven't even done good or bad Paul says, and God chose to love Jacob and hate Esau - whoa. I do not want to pretend like this is fluffy, light, cute stuff. It's not. This is a burden, this is heavy. God chooses to love some people and God chooses to hate some people.

Anytime you say God hates someone, I think you need to tremble. Here I stand, I'm a preacher and I'm supposed to be a spokesman for God, ok, so I'm representing God here. I get up here and I'm saying God hated Jacob. We just have to - whoa - be so careful we don't misrepresent God and who God is. Anytime you say God chose to save some and He chose to pass over others, that's not something we just - ha. It's not a kiddie pool we splash around in and play in. This is an ocean, and you can drown in this stuff. It's deep. You'll never get to the bottom of this. Again, we can talk about this as theology. Start putting faces on this.

Brothers and sisters like we talked about last week that don't know the Lord, mothers. I remember preaching on election and it was about the time that Howard's mother passed away, and to our knowledge at least she died unconverted. This isn't just theory, this is people, flesh and blood loved ones we're talking about here. This is deep stuff. Paul, when he finishes talking about this Doctrine of Election and Predestination, what does he say in Romans 11, "Oh the depths of the riches and knowledge and wisdom of God. How unsearchable are His judgments." How unsearchable are His decisions. How inscrutable are His ways. Why do You do things, God? It's too deep, we can't search it out, we can't make it out. So we need to be careful when we talk about these things. Don't pretend like they're easy, don't pretend like they're light, don't pretend like this is just, "Oh, yeah."

We need to be careful that we are not arrogant, proud. We're a church that delights in the sovereignty of God and many of you here may not have heard it, you might be new and this is new stuff to you. Others have been here and we've been preaching this for a long time. There's a danger that when you come to this knowledge, knowledge produces arrogance. You get puffed up with knowledge, and we start throwing around sovereignty and we become very arrogant. Let me just say, there are very few things in this world more obnoxious than an arrogant Calvinist. Very few things. I know probably cause I've been one maybe. I've certainly

seen them. We need to be very careful how we talk about these doctrines, and throw them around lightly.

If you're back in Malachi chapter 1, I have entitled this message, "A Theology of Love and Hate," because I'm convinced if we're really going to understand this text, we have to tackle this reality that is presented to us in Malachi, that God hated Esau. We could just skim right over it, just skip it, but if we're going to be serious about wanting to study God's Word, wanting to know God, we have to deal with this. God hated Esau. So, I have entitled this message, "A Theology of Love and Hate," because we have God loving Jacob and God hating Esau.

And I mentioned last Wednesday and then last Sunday as well, I mentioned one of my concerns in the big church in America at least today, is our shallow understanding of the love of God; just flippant. People talk about the love of God and it's just, I think I used two words, sentimental and shallow. Sentimental being the idea that it's just based on feeling – there's not any substance behind it. And we try to recreate this feeling, we want people..."Oh, let's talk about the love of God..." So we've got to work ourselves into really loving and being in awe of the love of God, and there's just nothing, there's no substance to it. If I can picture, if I can liken what I see in the broad evangelical circle today and how we view love, it's kind of like the first love of a teenage girl. She's 12 years old and she's met her 13 year old Prince Charming and she's enthralled with him. She's in love with him. And there's feeling, there's all kinds of feeling there. There's no substance. It will pass. There will be a new Prince Charming. It's puppy love.

When the kind of love God really has is a deep love and I start thinking of Milo and Edie Raub that have been married for decades, Ed and Patsy Carver, love that endures sorrow and loss and trials and time. It is tested, it is true, it is deep. That's the kind of love that we should see from God's love towards us. I'm convinced that one of the reasons we don't really understand the depth of God's love for us, is because we do not understand or consider the hatred of God. If we could put on a piece of paper and list the most unpopular subjects to talk about, not even just in the church, in the world, where would you put the hatred of God on that list? Does anybody like to talk about the hatred of God? Are very many people talking...we don't even think about that. We always say the love of God, which we should hear about the love of God, but I assert this morning that if you talk about the love of God all the time without

understanding the hatred of God, the love of God becomes nothing. It becomes very casual, generic. So I content to you this morning if we want to understand the reality and the wonder of the love of God, we must come to grips with the reality and the justice of God's hatred.

And my premise for that is Malachi, right here. Yahweh says to Israel, "I love you," and Israel says, "How, how have You loved us?" And how does God show His love for Israel? He said, "I hated Esau. That's how much I love you. Weren't you brothers? Wasn't he the firstborn? Shouldn't he have gotten the blessing? But, I have loved Jacob, I have hated Esau." That's how love is demonstrated. So that's the premise that I base this on this morning. We need a theology of God's hatred, and understanding and consideration.

It's not a subject I enjoy talking about. You know why? When I hear somebody say, "A Theology of Hate," guess what I think of – Islam, or even worse, literally worse, is this guy Fred Phelps. This "Baptist" pastor who protests at the funerals of soldiers who have died – "God hates fags," "God hates America," "Your God killed your son because hates him." I mean just grotesque, sick, abominable acts. When I think of, "A Theology of Hate," that's the kind of quacks that I think of. I think Fred Phelps has done more for advancing the homosexual agenda in our nation than any liberal legislator has ever done. People see that stuff and it just makes them sick. So we have to be very careful when we talk about the hatred of God, yet though we may be stereotyped, we do not have the option of neglecting this serious subject in Scripture.

And so this morning I'm going to attempt to outline for you first of all a theology of hate before we look at a theology of love. If we're going to preach this passage, we have to deal with this. You see in your Bibles, end of verse 2, God says, "I have loved Jacob, but Esau I have hated. There's three ways that people have tried to deal with this, incorrectly I'll add.

The first way happened about 1,800 years ago in the 2nd century. His name was Marcian. Marcian read about the Old Testament God and he said, "I don't like Him. I don't like all this killing and hatred and violence. Yahweh of the Old Testament is a bad God, so there must be two gods. I don't like Yahweh, I reject Yahweh, I believe in the Father of the Lord Jesus Christ. That's the God I want." Well we could do that. We could say, "Well, I know Yahweh hates Esau, but I don't like that kind of Yahweh." And I've people say, "If that's the kind of God that we

have, I don't want to have anything to do with Him." We don't have the luxury of picking and choosing how God reveals Himself to us. We assert this morning we have one God who has revealed Himself fully in two testaments, Old and New.

There's another way that people have tried to get rid of this, besides getting rid of the Old Testament. They look at the word "hate" and they try to lessen the word, "hate." God loved Jacob, and it's not that He "hated" Esau, He just loved him less. Now I'm not saying that is completely wrong, but I'm not sure it is the intention of the prophet of Malachi to say to Israel, "I just love Esau less." I don't see that in this word "hate." It's used several times in the Old Testament. And in virtually every instance that I saw, it just means hate. You look at the word "hate," I looked up the word hate in an English dictionary. Let me give you a definition from an English dictionary. It means to dislike intensely or passionately, to feel extreme hostility toward. Well when I look in Malachi, it says, "'I have hated Esau,' and then I see how the Lord reacts to Esau and to the Edomites, 'I have laid waste his hill country and left his heritage to jackals of the desert.' If Edom says, 'We are shattered but we will rebuild the ruins,' the LORD of hosts says, 'They may build, but I will tear down, and they will be called 'the wicked country,' and 'the people with whom the LORD is angry forever.'" I say that sure sounds like hate. That sounds like hostility. I don't think it's going to help reduce the scandal here by trying to redefine the word, "hate," and make it "love less."

There is one other way that people try to deal with this text to try to help us make it more palatable so that we can take it and not be quite so offended by it. And that is to understand that God here is not loving and hating individuals, but He loves and hates countries, not individuals. That it is what we call a corporate election. It's not that God loved Jacob as an individual and hated Esau as an individual, but God loved Israel and God hated the Edomites. Well there is a certain sense where clearly Jacob and Esau stand here not just for individuals but for the people they represent. Esau does stand for the Edomites. Jacob does stand for Israel. But I can't read that Romans 9 passage and see that Paul is talking about individual children – they were in the womb and before they had done any good or bad I chose Jacob to give him the promise, the covenant blessings, I hated Esau. That's clearly individual.

But there's another problem. Is making it a corporate election, a corporate love, or even a corporate rejection, does that lessen the offense at all? If hating an individual is bad, isn't hating a whole bunch of individuals just as bad? Is it just a faceless identity, or is it any less offensive for God to say, "I hate the Edomites." Well what does that mean if you're an Edomite? I was thinking of this and I just heard a story that happened a couple of months ago, back in April. I think it was a 13 or 14 year old boy, Travian Johnson, skateboarding in a park in L.A. Two guys from a Latino gang came up and shot and killed him, just out of nowhere. What had happened is a few hours earlier in the park there was a black gang called, I think, the Carver Park Kripps. They're in this park and a couple of members of a Latino gang are there, they catch them and they just beat the tar out of these Latino guys. These Latino guys go home, they're angry, humiliated, they get guns, they come back to the park and they have one purpose – kill the first black person they see. It just happened to be Travian Johnson. He wasn't even a gang member. They killed him because he was black. Is it any less offensive that they didn't hate Travian, they just hated black people? No, it does not help even this text to say, "Well God just hates the Edomites." So how then are we going to understand this text? That's why I believe we need an understanding, a theology of God's hatred if we're going to understand and appreciate and be in awe of God's love.

So I'm going to attempt this morning to set before you a theology of God's hatred:

First, it is a plain fact of Scripture that there are people God hates. Again, if we're going to do justice to our profession that this is the Bible, that we believe it's infallible and an accurate representation of who God is, it is indisputable that the Bible presents there are people God hates. And we go to Malachi 1 and 2 there, "I hated Esau," and by extension the Edomites. But the Edomites weren't the only ones God hated. You can turn back, you don't have to turn to all these passages but Leviticus chapter 20 – the children of Israel, they've been delivered from the land of Egypt, they're supposed to go in and possess the Promised Land, and Moses and the Lord, they exhort Israel to keep Yahweh's rules and statutes, they give the Law. You know, this is how you need to behave, do this, live this way, and then this is what the Lord says in Leviticus 20:23, "Do not walk in the customs of the nation that I am driving out before you, the Canaanites. Don't walk, don't live the way they do, for they did all these things, all the things

that the Law prohibited, they did them all, and therefore I hated them.” So Edomites weren’t alone in God’s hatred.

God hated the Canaanites. Turn to Psalm 5. We love King David, we love his Psalms. I try to read a Psalm every day. What does the Psalmist reveal to us about Yahweh, Jehovah? Psalm 5 – “The boastful shall not stand before your eyes. You hate all evil doers. You destroy those who speak lies. The Lord abhors the bloodthirsty and deceitful man.” Psalm 11:5 – the Psalmist again tells us, “His soul hates the wicked and the one who loves violence.” Surely it’s not difficult for us to understand the God who is holy and just and righteous that hates evil men who practice evil. And there is a special hatred of God for those that are violent, those that are deceitful, those that defraud and oppress. God hates people that do that. Ivan the Terrible, he was just a wretched, cruel, brutal dictator in Russia. It shouldn’t be difficult at all to fathom that God hates violent, wicked people; men who break into a family’s home and brutalize a family and kill. It shouldn’t be surprising God hates violent people.

Now that’s kind of my second point. First is it’s a plain fact of Scripture that God hates, but secondly, God doesn’t hate indiscriminately. It’s not arbitrary. It’s not capricious. If you have a capricious boss, what does that mean? It means, you go to work one day, something happens, and he blows up. The next day it happens and he smiles and says, “Ha, that’s alright.” You don’t know what to expect. He’s arbitrary, he’s erratic. God in His hatred is not arbitrary, erratic. It is clear. The Bible says, “God hates evil doers.” He hates the sinners. He hates wicked, violent people. When the Bible tells us God hated Esau, you say, “Oh, that poor man. Oh this poor innocent man, God just hates you.” That’s not the presentation of Esau at all in Scripture. Esau is an absolute godless man. Esau was in a family in which Yahweh Himself had come to his father and made Himself known to His father, revealed Himself and Esau says, “I don’t want anything to do with God. I don’t care about God. God is nothing to me.”

He is so unimpressed with God he sells God’s blessing, his birthright, for a bowl of soup. “I don’t care about God, I don’t care about the things of God.” If we’re going to understand the theology of hatred and especially looking at Edom, how God says in Malachi 1 that, “I have hated Esau,” and by extension the Edomites, we really need to understand who Edom is and what has transpired to see the justice of God in hating the Edomites. This may seem a little bit academic

and I don't mean for that to be, but I believe it's that important that we need to have a grasp on history and understanding of God's hatred for Edom.

Let me just explain a few things. First of all, Edom and Israel were basically perennial enemies, constant hostilities between the two. They were brothers, remember, but Esau had his family and it multiplied and grew and Jacob had his family and it multiplied and grew, and it was kind of like Hatfield's and McCoy's, except they're related. They're just always never getting along, and yet the Lord said the older (Esau) would serve the younger (Jacob). And as history unfolds we see that taking place because by the time of King Saul and King David, guess what, Israel has subdued the Edomites. The Edomites are basically part of Israel, but they're distinct from Israel. They are basically the servants of the land. You find King Saul, remember he had a special servant. His name was Doeg the Edomite. He was Saul's hunchman. And when Saul is enraged at David and he wants to kill the priest that helped David, none of the Israelites would kill the priest but Doeg would. He slays the priest. He doesn't care about the Lord's anointed. David you find during his reign he sent garrisons in the land of Edom. They ruled the Edomites, and they were their servants, their workers. For generations there were hostilities.

But by the time of Jehoram in 2 Chronicles 21, Edom revolted, and they actually established their own king. They became their own little country. They broke away from Israel and they became their own people. A few generations later under King Ahaz, Edom actually invaded Judah. They came into the land of Judah and they carried off captives. They shed innocent blood, they killed these Jews. We read that now and say, "Oh, ok, yeah." What would you feel like, and I say this, I don't know if Gary's still here at the risk of offending, but what would you think if Canada kind of got rich and powerful from all the oil they get from their oil sands and they said, "You know, Michigan's unprotected. Let's just go in and let's ravage Michigan. Let's haul off..." We would be enraged. They're our neighbors, we're cousins. What are you doing coming into our country? That's exactly what happened with Edom. Edom comes in and they haul off captives and they kill people in Judah.

Of course then we know by 586BC, 2Chronicles 36, that the Chaldean's and they utterly destroy Jerusalem and the temple. I mean they decimate it. And it was a horrible, horrible scene. Before they went in, before they tore down the walls of Jerusalem, before they destroyed the

temple, literally leveled the temple, they had laid siege to the city. It was a gruesome sight. Literally starve the city to death. It didn't happen overnight.

There's something that happened that really becomes pivotal in the whole story of Israel and Edom. If you have your Bibles it's probably good for you to see this. Turn to Psalm 137. This is a Psalm of exile. It was written during the time that Israel is in Babylon. Those that survived the siege are carried off as captives. They are taunted to sing about Zion in the first few verses of Psalm 137. Listen to their prayer, verse 7. Remember, O LORD, against the Edomites the day of Jerusalem, how they said, "Lay it bare, lay it bare, down to its foundations!" They're cheering. They are cheering while the Babylonians are utterly destroying this place. Now this can be real sterile, oh yeah, they're cheering, but you got to see the graphic nature of what is happening and what happened to Judah at this time.

Lamentations 4 covers the same period of time. Lamentations 4, written by Jeremiah, the weeping prophet, he describes Israel during this day. He describes Jerusalem. Lamentations 4:4, "The tongue of the nursing infant sticks to the roofs of its mouth for thirst." We have a lot of infants in this nursery right now. What kind of sight would it be to see one literally starving to death, and even thirst happens within a few days, and they are so thirsty they can't even cry. That's not a pretty sight. The children beg for food but no one gives to them. Streets filled with children, running around, begging, "Please mister, give us some food," starving to death. This is an ugly, wretched situation. Verse 6, Jeremiah says the chastisement of the daughter of my people has been greater than the punishment of Sodom. At least Sodom was overthrown in a moment, but look at this ongoing, terrible stretching out of this. Verse 10, "The hands of compassionate women have boiled their own children; they became their food during the destruction of the daughter of my people." I mean we don't even like to think about this stuff. So hungry you eat your children.

Verse 14 describes the scene after the invasion. They wandered blind through the streets. They were so defiled with blood that no one was able to touch their garments. The idea is that bloodshed is so overwhelming as they kill and dash to pieces children, stab and cut and destroy, please are walking around and they are so soaked in blood you couldn't touch any part of their garment that wasn't saturated in blood. This is a grotesque picture. And that is Edom doing?

“Yes, lay it bare, tear ‘em up.” I think the closest we could even begin to think of the feeling – back in 9/11 remember when it all happened and our nation is on its knees. We are shocked, and then we see footage of people in, I think, Iran and Libya cheering. “Yeah!” How did that make you feel? Make you happy? It is evil. It is wicked. The only thing that could even make it even close to what is going on in Israel and Edom, I mean these are cousins, these are related people group, if after 9/11 it wasn’t the Libyans or the Iranians cheering, but it would be the Canadians or the Mexicans. And they’re cheering, “Yeah.”

And you know what the text tells us? Ezekiel 35 tells us why they were cheering. Not only did they hate Israel, but they were saying, “Their lands is ours now.” We’ll go down, we’ll take their land. And Ezekiel 35 says the Edomites were blaspheming the God of Israel. “Where’s Yahweh now, look at Him.” These are evil people. And God’s hatred of Edom is anything but arbitrary. God’s hatred of anyone will never be erratic, but it is because of sin and their evil deeds.

Here’s a third aspect of hatred that is so absolutely important though for us to understand. And if people do not include this aspect, you will have a distorted understanding of God’s hatred. God does hate people, He does not hate people arbitrarily, but here’s the third point and I hope you’ll remember this. God extends mercy and kindness even to those He hates. This is huge. God extends mercy and kindness even to those He hates.

In Deuteronomy, God made it very clear to the children of Israel. Deuteronomy chapter 2, “Do not hate your brother Edom.” Don’t hate the Edomites, they’re your brothers. As a matter of fact the Lord says, “When I take you out of the land of Egypt, don’t you dare try to take land from the Edomites. I have given them land. I have given them Mount Seir as their possession. It’s their land.” Here God has taken His perennial enemies of His people and He gives them a land, their own land, and He tells Israel, “Don’t touch them.” And then God even gives them rain and sunshine and air and love and sex and food and all the wonderful benefits that a creator God gives to His people. He shows kindness and mercy to the Edomites, and even gives them their own possession.

But it even goes beyond that. His extension of His mercy goes beyond that. Deuteronomy 23:7, God instructs Israel and says, “You shall not abhor an Edomite for he is your brother. You shall

not abhor an Egyptian because you were sojourner in his land. And then verse 8, “Children born to them in the third generation may enter the assembly of the Lord.” God even opened up covenant blessings to the Edomites. That word “assembly” is significant. When the Greeks, when they were translating the Old Testament, guess which word they used – *ekklēsia*, the word “church.” Literally you could say, God opened up the doors of the church to the Edomites, just, “You can come in.”

Now this is so amazing because the Edomites knew the God of Israel. They knew the God of Israel, and we learn from the Exodus story that when they saw what the God of Israel did to the Egyptians, they were terrified. They were afraid He was going to do that to them, so it’s not like He’s some strange foreign deity, they don’t know if He exists. They know that the God of Israel exists and He’s a very powerful God. And God opens the doors and He says, “I’ll let them come into the assembly. I’ll let them be a part of covenant blessings.” This is huge. Yes God hates. He hates evil-doers. But even in the midst of this hatred He extends mercy and kindness, just like He does to the Edomites.

But the last thing we would have to say about those that God hates, is that He pursues them finally and ultimately with the justice they deserve. Clearly that the story of Esau and Edom. They rejected God. They were evil, wicked people. They did not repent. They did not return. They did not come to Yahweh, and so God in His hatred pursues them with justice and gives them everything that they deserve. “I have laid waste his hill country. I’ve left his heritage to jackals. You are shattered, you think you’ll rebuild. I’ll tear it down again. They will be called the wicked country, the people whom the Lord is angry forever.” God gives exactly what they deserve to the people He hates. They get exactly what they deserve. They get justice.

When you begin to understand God’s hatred and you get grasp of theology of hatred, He does hate, but He doesn’t hate indiscriminately. He is kind and merciful to those that He does hate, but as they refuse Him and continue in their wickedness, He will destroy them. He will give them justice.

To me it’s not a problem of how God can hate Esau or how God can hate Edomites or Canaanites. That’s not the problem how a holy, righteous God could hate people that do evil,

wicked, mean things. To me the only question is, how can God love Jacob? That's the question. That's the scandal. Jacob is no better than Esau. He is a conniving, deceitful coward. When he meets, remember he's deceived Esau out of his blessing and they separate and Esau says, "I'm going to kill you," he's out wandering and he realizes he's going to meet Esau and all of his company. What does he do? He puts his first wife at the front, so Esau will have to kill all them and he's at the back so he can get away. This is a deceitful, cowardly, evil guy. Why would God choose Jacob? That's the scandal. Why would God choose to love Israel? Is Israel any better than the Edomites? They are wicked, stubborn, sinful, idolatrous, adulterous people. And yet God says, "I love them." He set His love on them.

Let's talk about a theology of love then. If we're going to talk about a theology of love we must know this.

Number 1, God puts His love on people He should hate. Jacob should have never been loved by God. Ever. It's scandalous how God can love anyone. That is the scandal, and yet we arrogant, proud people – "Oh, how can God hate anybody." We should be saying, "How can God love anybody?" We are such sinful people, and the scandal of God's love as you open up the New Testament and you read the pages and the message of God's Word to the church, what does He say to the believers at Ephesus? Ephesians 2:3, "You were by nature children of wrath, even as the rest." You are no different than your pagan neighbors. You are no different than the godless peoples of all the world. You are objects of God's wrath. You are children of wrath, that's who you are by nature.

Is there anybody in this room right now, and if you want to show your hands, do, that think you are any better than your neighbors that don't know Christ? Is there anyone in this room who says, "Oh, I'm so much better than my co-workers. I'm much less sinful than they are." Do you believe that? If you are then you are a fool or you're blind. The truth is, you were as sinful and wicked as your unsaved neighbors and unsaved family. God didn't choose you because you're better or more lovable or easier to get along with. He set His love on you even though by nature you were a child of wrath, just like everybody else. You should have been an object of His hatred, but God in His sovereign mercy says, "No, you will be an object of My love, not because of who you are, but because of who I am."

Should that not make us stop and say, "Why?" Given the right situation, the right environment, and the right opportunity, there's very few people in this room, there isn't a sin you wouldn't commit if you thought you could get away with it. Do not think for a moment, don't deceive yourself in thinking you're just a little better. I believe the question every Christian must ask, I mean that, every Christian must ask, "Why me? Why am I a Christian?" It changed my life about 20 years ago. "Why?" Why my neighbors aren't a Christian? Why am I a Christian, and you know what was in the back of my mind? Obviously I'm better, obviously I'm smarter, obviously I'm more in tune with God. And I knew enough of the Bible to know that's a bad answer. Cause that's not how God says salvation is. It's not to the better, to the wiser, or to the more in tuned. It's by grace,

Now when I realized for the first time why I was a Christian was because God in His mercy chose to love me, it brought me to my knees. The answer to why I am a Christian...there's only one answer...but God. That's what Ephesians 2 says. You were by nature a child of wrath, just like everyone else...but God. God made you alive.

Another thing about the love God, we saw in those He hates He extends mercy to them. He offers them salvation, and I think that is a model for us. It's a model of understanding the gospel in the New Testament. God hated the Edomites and yet He extended covenant blessings to them. He says, "Come to the assembly. Repent, come to Me." You read John 3:16, what does John 3:16 say, "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish." I'm telling you, there is on the part of God an extension of His kindness and mercy, even to those He hates. The cosmos, the world, that which is in rebellion to Him, and what is it that motivates God to offer them salvation? Love. Even in His hatred God has love. He had love for the Edomites. Why would He open up covenant blessings to the Edomites? Because in His heart there was love for the Edomites. Even in His hatred there was love for the Edomites. How does God love the world? Even in His hatred He says, "Here's My Son. Whoever will believe will not perish but have everlasting life."

So God extends mercy and kindness to those He hates. But here's the difference to those He loves. God gives mercy to those He loves. That's the story of our lives. God gives us mercy.

Paul says in Romans 9, "We are vessels prepared for mercies. We are bowls that God is just going to fill up with His mercy, not giving us what we deserve." Those who hate, they get exactly what they deserve, they will get justice. We will get mercy. Mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy, mercy. Mercy that never ends. Mercy that endures forever. And just as we saw with those God hates, God pursues them with justice. They may rebuild, but He will bring justice. He will bring His wrath upon them.

When you come to those who God loves, He pursues them with mercy and love. And I wrote in one of my Bibles here when it says that you may build, I will tear it down. Just looking at God pursuing them in justice, I wrote in my Bible Psalm 23:6. David said, "Surely goodness and mercy follow me all the days of my life." The mercy of God chases down those He loves, continually not giving us what we deserve, continually showing us mercy, continually giving us good for our evil, continuing to be faithful to our unfaithfulness, continuing to confess sin. God's mercy pursues us to the very end. That's what it means to be an object of God's love. He pursues us with His love.

The question some of you need to ask this morning is, are you an object of God's hatred or an object of His love? Then to you He extends mercy today. He extends His Son Jesus Christ. "Come to Me, trust Me, trust in My Son. Believe that His sacrifice, I put Him to death for sin so that all who believe in Him receive the forgiveness of sin." Come to Jesus Christ. For those of you this morning that are here and you know Christ, what does it mean to you to be objects of God's love? Shouldn't you walk outside, maybe you're going to go out to eat, and look around you and you're going to see a lot of lost people. "How have you loved Me, Lord?" "I've chosen you for salvation, and I passed over a lot of other people." How is that going to affect you this morning? How is the love of God going to help you this morning? I hope immensely. Let's pray.

Father I thank You for Your Word. I want to be faithful to it. I want to be faithful presenting You rightly to Your people, to the world. I pray that understanding, not only Your hatred, but with understanding Your hatred, we will understand truly Your love. We owe it all to you, and we only love You because you first loved us. That's the message of Scripture. That's why we need a thousand tongues to sing our great Redeemer's praise. May You bless this Word in Jesus' name. Amen.

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