

A time to love and a time to hate

⁴³ “You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbour and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

(Matthew 5:43-48)

What do Jesus and John Lennon have in common? They both said “all you need is love”. John Lennon wrote the famous Beatles song ‘All you need is love’ and when Jesus was asked by the Pharisees about the law and which is the greatest commandment he said all you need is love. He put it like this:

³⁴ Hearing that Jesus had silenced the Sadducees, the Pharisees got together. ³⁵ One of them, an expert in the law, tested him with this question: ³⁶ “Teacher, which is the greatest commandment in the Law?”

³⁷ Jesus replied: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.”^[a] ³⁸ This is the first and greatest commandment. ³⁹ And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbour as yourself.’^[d] ⁴⁰ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.”

(Matthew 22:34-40)

Jesus often had a problem with the Pharisees complicating God’s law. The Jews had hundreds of little laws that were designed to help the Jewish people obey the Ten Commandments. But it all became very complicated and actually made obeying the law very difficult. So Jesus’ answer must have seemed shockingly simplistic. They were probably expecting something deep and meaningful and yet Jesus gives a very simple response: basically “Love God and love others.”

Jesus said the whole law and the prophets hang on these two principles. If we get these two things right then everything else will fall into place. If you think about it, it does cover the whole of the Ten Commandments doesn’t it? If we love God perfectly and love other people perfectly then we will find that we have obeyed God’s law perfectly. Or let me put it another way, when we break one of God’s laws isn’t it because we have either failed to love God or failed to love our neighbour?

The Apostle Paul said:

¹ If I speak in the tongues^[a] of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ² If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. ³ If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast,^[b] but do not have love, I gain nothing.

(1 Cor 13:1-3)

Paul challenges us on three levels here: Words (v1) / Knowledge (v2) / Deeds (v3) – all useless if they are without love.

You may be very good with words, you might be able to give a fantastic sermon, but if it is done without love it is just noise. You may be very brainy and have a string of qualifications, you might be a Dr. or a Sir. but if you don't have love, your qualifications and status are worthless. You may be a model Christian giving sacrificially of your possessions and yourself, but if it is not driven by love, it is nothing.

So love is so important. If God is love then those who belong to him, those in whom he dwells must also learn to love.

Our priority of course should be to love God above all else. This is the most important thing for anyone who wants to be a disciple of Jesus but it is not as easy as it sounds. Jesus gave this challenge:

[Luke 14:26 - ²⁶ "If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple.](#)

Why does Jesus say this? Does he really mean that we should hate our families? What about the fifth commandment to honour your father and mother? Well of course Jesus wasn't going against that commandment but rather he was challenging casual followers. Jesus was a very popular teacher and great crowds of people followed him wherever he went. It would have been easy for people to have gone along with the crowd but Jesus was explaining what it meant to be a true disciple. They needed to love him to such an extent that everything else paled into insignificance and if it came to it, they needed to be prepared to choose Jesus over their own families. This was a tough challenge in a culture where choosing Jesus could mean alienation from your family – many still face that challenge today.

Jesus gave an even greater challenge:

[²² You will be hated by everyone because of me, but the one who stands firm to the end will be saved.](#)
[Matthew 10:22](#)

We need to be sure of where our allegiance lies. Those who are not truly committed in this way cannot be disciples. Discipleship is not the easy option nor will it make you popular, it is likely in fact to make you a few enemies. And what do we do with our enemies?

Jesus said love your enemies:

[⁴³ "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor^{\[1\]} and hate your enemy.' ⁴⁴ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵ that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. ⁴⁶ If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? ⁴⁷ And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? ⁴⁸ Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.](#)

[\(Matthew 5:43-48\)](#)

This is a hard lesson isn't it? Love your enemies. It's easy to say and it's probably a principle that we would all agree with. I mean wouldn't the world be a different place if we loved our enemies?

Imagine what that would do to war. Well we are going to go to war with this country and show love to them. Could a soldier shoot the enemy if he truly loved them? Would a war start in the first place if we loved one another?

We all have people we find easier to love than others and it would be easy for us to say 'well I love those who show love to me but not those who are against me.' But Jesus said well anyone can do that. What's so good about that? It's easy to love those who love you, that requires no effort at all, but it is much harder to love those who don't like you. Those who want to see you fail.

We struggle with people sometimes, we recognise their sin and we often we want people to change before we will love them. Jesus did things differently. Think of Zaccheus or the woman at the well. Both people who were hated in their society. Everyone knew of their sinfulness. They pushed Zaccheus out when he wanted to see Jesus and the woman at the well was so unpopular that she had to collect water in the heat of the day when everyone else stayed indoors. But Jesus showed love to these hated people and as a result they changed.

We don't have to love sin, we should maintain our hatred for sin as God hates sin. But we should love the sinner, the person as God loves sinners.

⁷ Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. ⁸ But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

(Romans 5:7-8)

Paul says a couple of verses down that when Christ died for us, we were his enemies and yet he showed his love to us by dying for us. He did not wait for us to change and then love us, he loved us while we were still sinners.

Following Jesus is the best path we can choose but it is not an easy call.

Following Jesus is a time for love and a time for hate:

- Love God so much that you hate everything else by comparison
- Love People but hate sin in people
- Be prepared to be hated by others but demonstrate God's love even to those who hate you