

Meeting With Christ

Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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IF ANYONE COMES TO ME AND DOES NOT HATE

Luke 14:26

Discipleship is fundamentally a call to allegiance. Jesus is to have first place over everything and everyone. In the gospel of Luke, the Lord mentions father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, and even one's own soul. Nothing else is to be first. Let's read this passage. Luke 14:26.

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."

I have already commented on this verse when we studied Luke 14:25-33. Today I would like to come back to it because I feel that there is much more that can be said. And I am going to focus on the command 'to hate,' hating father, mother, wife ... 'If you don't hate your family,' Jesus says, 'You cannot be My disciples.' What does 'hate' mean here? This is what we are going to explore.

The call to hate

Jesus was speaking to large crowds of people. They were traveling with Him because they wanted to hear His teaching. Perhaps many of these followers considered themselves disciples of this popular teacher. But too often, the call to discipleship attracts people who are only interested in receiving the great benefits offered by God. And Jesus was not interested in cheap discipleship. Yes, there are eternal benefits, but salvation and discipleship involve much more. They involve an unbelievable cost. Just what does it cost to follow Christ? Well, the first thing that the Lord said is this. 'If you want to be My disciple, you must hate your father and your mother.'

These words are very strong, as you can tell, and they must have created quite a stir among the people. Interestingly, Jesus made that controversial statement without any clarification. It is as though He was deliberately driving the crowd away because He knew that the only people who would stay back in the face of this kind of saying are people who are drawn by God in search of the truth. Seeing the growing number of hearers which now surrounded Him, Jesus used this language to startle them, and impress upon them the difference between a mere interest in Him and a true adhesion to Him.

The call to hate, obviously, is not literal. Jesus does not demand actual hatred of one's own parents. Otherwise, He would be going directly against the fifth commandment to honor father and mother (Exodus 20:12). One cannot hate what he honors. The command to love one's neighbor as oneself as a summation of what God desires would make no sense either (Luke 10:25-37). And besides, Jesus taught that the believer is to love even his enemies (Luke 6:27).

Hate: loving less?

Many commentators say that the 'hating' should be taken as 'loving less.' In support of this interpretation, they quote Matthew 10:37 where Jesus makes a similar point. The main difference is that He speaks of 'loving family less' than Him rather than 'hating' family members.

Matthew 10:37. He who loves father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me; and he who loves son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me.

Father, mother, son and daughter are not to be loved more than Jesus. Luke 14:26 may thus be expressed in this way. 'If anyone comes to Me, and does not love his father less than he loves Me ... cannot be My disciple.'

This argument, in my opinion, is not very convincing. From an exegetical standpoint, we cannot compare directly Luke 14:26 and Matthew 10:37 because these two passages are not parallels. The context is different and the period of time in the Lord's teaching is different. Matthew 10:37 was addressed to the twelve apostles when they were being sent out. This happened in the middle of Jesus' ministry. Luke 14:26 came from the last part of Jesus' ministry and it was addressed to the multitudes, not just to the apostles.

And besides, if all that Jesus wanted to say was simply that we need to love God more and love family less, then the use of the word 'hate' is hardly the way to convey the idea. If He had 'loving less' in mind (which He expressed explicitly in Matthew 10:37), He could have just used those terms in Luke 14:36. But He chose to say 'hate.' When you want to teach a person that he ought to 'love less,' why would you use the word 'hate?' 'Hate' is a much stronger expression and it can easily be misunderstood.

To hate: an aversion

A safer exegetical method is to see how the Lord Jesus uses the word 'hate' elsewhere in His teaching. Can we find instances in which He also means 'love less'? If He often uses the word 'hate' in the sense of loving less, then we could say that it is quite likely that it has this meaning in Luke 14:36. What we need to do is to take a concordance and look at the word 'hate' (*miseo*) when it is used by Jesus.

Here is the list of all the passages (excluding Luke 14:36):

- Matthew 5:43-44; 6:24; 10:22; 24:9-10.
- Mark 13:13.
- Luke 1:71; 6:22; 6:27; 16:13; 19:14; 21:17.
- John 3:20; 7:7; 12:25; 15:18-19; 15:23-25; 17:14.

Let's take just a couple of examples.

- *Luke 6:22. "Blessed are you when men **hate** you, and ostracize you, and cast insults at you, and spurn your name as evil, for the sake of the Son of Man.* The world is in opposition to the disciples. It hates them. It ostracizes them, casts insults at them and spurns their name as evil. That doesn't sound like 'loving less.'
- *Luke 21:16-17. But you will be delivered up even by parents and brothers and relatives and friends, and they will put some of you to death, and you will be **hated** by all on account of My name.* Just before the end time, there will be an intensification of persecution throughout the whole world. The world will hate Christ's followers as never before. As you can see, it is not a matter of being loved less.

I invite you to look at the other verses. You will make the same observation. When Jesus uses the word 'hate,' it means 'hate,' not 'love less.'

Now, some people who favor the 'love less' view quote OT passages. They say that 'to love less' is not an uncommon meaning of the word 'hate' in the OT. The example that is most often given is in Genesis 29:31.

*Genesis 29:31. When the Lord saw that Leah was **hated**, he opened her womb; but Rachel was barren.*

Here Leah is said to be hated. Some commentators explain that Leah was not properly and simply hated by Jacob, but comparatively. In comparison to Rachel, Leah was less loved. And they say that it is in that sense that we are required to hate father and mother in Luke 14.26 where the comparison is with Christ. We are to love our father and our mother less in comparison to our love for Jesus.

But is this a valid argument? Can 'hate' take the meaning of 'loving less' in the OT? The Hebrew word for 'hate,' *sane*, usually 'expresses an emotional attitude towards persons or things which are opposed, detested, despised and with which one wishes to have no contact or relationship. It is therefore the opposite of love' (Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament, #2272). That is why we find in certain translations the term 'unloved,' ... *the Lord saw that Leah was **unloved**...*

It is true that it can include, to a certain extent, the idea of loving less, but when you look at the facts of Genesis 29, it seems to me that it is much stronger than that. There the word 'hated' means 'rejected, disliked, despised,' and not merely 'less loved.'

This is not hard to understand. Jacob loved Rachel very much and so he worked seven years for his father-in-law in order to get her. After these seven years, he thought he had Rachel, but he got tricked by his father-in-law, Laban, into marrying Leah. When Jacob demanded an explanation, Laban simply said, 'In our country, it is not right to marry the younger daughter before the older one.' In that context, you see why he felt bitterness and frustration towards Leah. He certainly loved her less. There is truth in that. But it is not just that. It is much stronger than that. He despised her because she was imposed upon him through deceit. He was forced to marry her, or he could not have Rachel, the woman he loved. And Leah complained to God about her rejection. *The Lord has heard that I am hated*, she said in Genesis 29:33.

The same observation can be applied to Deuteronomy 21:15-17. There Moses talks about the 'hated one' (*sane*), the wife who is 'hated' by her husband.

*Deuteronomy 21:15. If a man has two wives, one greatly loved and the other **hated**, and the two of them have had children by him; and if the first son is the child of the **hated** wife:*

*16 Then when he gives his property to his sons for their heritage, he is not to put the son of his loved one in the place of the first son, the son of the **hated** wife:*

17 But he is to give his first son his birthright, and twice as great a part of his property: for he is the first-fruits of his strength and the right of the first son is his.

The hating that is referred to here is the aversion a husband has for his wife. It is not just that he loves her less. Moses used it to state that an aversion to a wife is no good reason for the husband to disinherit her son as the firstborn. The firstborn son must be given the double share of the father's inheritance even though he was the son of his father's hated wife.

Hating and killing

The ultimate manifestation of hatred is murder. You hate a person to the point of killing him. In Deuteronomy 19:4, we find this relationship between hatred and killing. It discusses the case of a man who killed somebody without hating him.

*Deuteronomy 19:4. And this is the case of the manslayer who flees there, that he may live: Whoever kills his neighbor unintentionally, not having **hated** (sane) him in time past.*

The wording of this passage implies that normally you kill when you hate. But sometimes, a person may kill somebody without hating him previously. What does that mean concretely? It means that he killed unintentionally. It was an accident. He did not hate the person. And here in Deuteronomy 19, we find a legal discussion on how to deal with a person who killed someone he never hated in the past.

So you see, whether it is Jesus who uses the word 'hate' or whether it is the OT that uses it, there is little evidence that 'hate' means 'love less.' 'Hate' means 'hate.' It might appear to have the meaning of loving less sometimes, but when we examine the context, we always find some form of aversion.

By now, I am sure that some of you are feeling uncomfortable and you are wondering what I am getting at. You are probably saying to yourself, 'I don't suppose that you are trying to tell us that the Lord is teaching us to literally hate our parents.'

Of course not! I explained the reasons at the beginning of the lesson.

Jesus' language in Luke 14:26 is much sharper than in Matthew 10:37. There is a certain amount of hyperbole in the passage in Luke, it is true, but its interpretation must not be watered down till the point is gone. And I don't agree with those who say that 'to hate' simply means 'to love less.' Jesus deliberately chose the term 'hate' and it is important for us to interpret His declaration without blunting the force of that word.

Hate: a sacrifice

There is a sense in which the Lord was speaking from appearances. In that statement, the person appears to hate those who are supposed to be the closest to him. It seems like he is expressing hatred in his action. What did he do exactly? He forsook, he sacrificed the people whom he loved the most - his parents, his children, his siblings, himself - in order to become a disciple of Christ. So I would like to make this suggestion. To hate, here, does not mean to love less. It means 'to offer up to God what you love the most.'

This implies that it is costing you something. It is very easy to give away what you dislike anyway. It is very hard to offer up what you love. What makes the Lord's teaching so hard here is precisely because I love my father, my mother, my children, my sister and brother, and myself.

You know, under the law of sacrifice, no animal would be offered to God unless that animal was perfect. You could not offer a lame animal. You could not offer it if it had so much as one spot. It had to be absolutely the best. If you offer what is of no value to you, you have given nothing at all. If you offer what you love, only then is there a cost to count. Remember that Jesus was speaking about counting the cost in Luke 14. To count the cost is only necessary when you offer something that you love dearly.

I would like to illustrate the meaning of hating what we love by this dramatic OT passage. Genesis 22:10.

Genesis 22:10. And Abraham stretched out his hand, and took the knife to slay his son.

It is one thing to claim to believe God's word; it is quite another thing to obey it. This was the greatest test in the life of Abraham: he was to sacrifice his son as a burnt offering. God said to him in v. 2, "*Take now your son, your only son Isaac, **whom you love**, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains of which I shall tell you.*"

The test was designed to prove faith. And for it to be a real test, it had to be something Abraham would resist. If Isaac did not mean anything to Abraham, offering him up to God would not have been a problem. But Isaac was his son, 'whom he loved' we are told. God said, 'You shall offer up Isaac to Me. You shall hate him. You shall kill Isaac on a mountain that I will point out to you.'

'You shall hate what you love. You shall kill Isaac.' That is the ultimate expression of hatred. Here hatred is not so much a feeling. It is an action, the action of putting someone to death. Outwardly, it seems like Abraham hated his son. You don't normally kill someone you love, do you? Of course not. But Abraham was commanded to kill a person he loved. He had to hate what he loved. He had to offer up his son to God.

Abraham obeyed God's command to the last extremity. He had his knife in his hand and was about to give the fatal thrust. But in the nick of time, the angel of the Lord appeared and said, 'Stop! Do nothing to your son. I now know that you fear God. You proved that you have faith because you have not withheld your son from Me.' Abraham showed that he had the full intention of putting his son to death and this was taken by God as if it was actually done. What a beautiful picture! This passage portrays an obedient servant worshipping God in faith at great cost.

And this is what Jesus was pointing at in Luke 14:26. He was saying, 'I want you to offer up as a sacrifice to Me what is precious to you, even yourself, in the same way that Abraham offered up Isaac.' So we are to hate, not in the sense of any emotion, but in the sense of offering up to God what we value. We are to hate ourselves in the sense of offering up ourselves to God as a living sacrifice. Here you recognize the writing of Paul in Romans 12:1. *Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God.*

Having Abraham's faith

Basically, Jesus is talking in Luke 14:26 about faith, about saving faith. He is saying, 'Without faith, you cannot be My disciple.' How is faith to be expressed? In hating your father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters and even your own life. In offering up to God the very thing that you love, as Abraham offered up Isaac, the son whom he loved.

Understand this. The only faith that saves is the Abrahamic type of faith in which one hates what he loves. That is why Abraham is called the father of the faithful. If you are a spiritual son of Abraham, you have this kind of faith and you will do what he did. What did he do? At least two NT passages link Abraham's faith to his willingness to sacrifice his son for God.

*Hebrews 11:17. By **faith** Abraham, when he was tested, **offered up Isaac**; and he who had received the promises was offering up his only begotten son.*

*James 2:21-22. Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he **offered Isaac** his son on the altar? Do you see that **faith** was working together with his works, and by works **faith** was made perfect?*

This is exactly what Jesus is dealing with in Luke 14. 'You must have Abraham's faith. Just as Abraham hated what he loved, so nobody can be My disciple unless he has committed himself to hate what he loves.' You love yourself? Give your body as a living offering to God. You love your parents? Offer that relationship to God. You love your wife? Do the same thing.

So remember. The command to hate in Luke 14 means that we are to offer up what we love to God. If you have Abraham's faith, you will sacrifice everything to God and you will regard nothing as your personal possession anymore. In that sense, Isaac was never again Abraham's. He had actually killed Isaac in the sense that in his heart, he had finished with him. Isaac became the Lord's possession.