

# A Study in Values and "Conflicting" Obligations

and

## Application of These Principles to the Bible's Use of the Words "Love" and "Hate"

### IMPORTANT Introductory Comments!

This study began with a look at Psalm 5:5, where we read that God hates those who do evil. The passage does *not* say, "God loves the sinner but hates the sin." Here, it says he hates the sinner. This forces us to decide whether to accept what it says "as is," or to "interpret" it in a manner that we find more acceptable. If we accept it "as is," we must then ask the question of "how" (or "why") this verse is true.

Since our "starting point" is that God's Word is to be accepted "as is," this study explores those questions. In doing so, we discover that this verse is not the only instance in which such an emphasis occurs. We also discover that this concept of "hate" is actually compatible with the Bible's concept of "love." We do not have to be apologetic, defensive or embarrassed, when we discover verses such as this one!

Beyond all this, however, we discover that this "love-hate" concept opens up an entire perspective toward understanding the Bible - and toward life itself. And so, though this study began with a look at the word "hate," it has expanded to include some of the most fundamental issues regarding values, obligations and perspective on life.

**Because these issues are so fundamental to one's perspective about the Bible and life, we urge you to *not* blindly accept what is written. *Search the Scriptures yourself (as in Acts 17:11), to see if these things are true!***

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### OUTLINE OF THE SECTIONS

- **PART 1** - An Introduction to the "Love / Hate" Issue; Three Things to Consider
- **PART 2** - A More In-Depth Look at How Various Levels of Obligations Relate to Each Other
- **PART 3** - What If There Appears to Be Conflicts Between Different Moral Obligations?
- **PART 4** - The Problem of "Half-Truths"
- **PART 5** - Suggestions and Final Comments for Dealing With Obligations and Conflicts Between Them
- **PART 6** - Additional Comments about Our "Other Obligations"
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- **PART 9** - A Few Things You Can Do (For Further Study)

## **PART 1:**

### **An Introduction to the "Love / Hate" Issue; Three Things to Consider**

In many passages, the Bible associates the word "love" with God. God loves the world (John 3:16); he has a special love for those who belong to him (the "church" - Ephesians 5:25b; the "children of God" - 1 John 3:1); etc. Most people focus their attention on these "positive" references about God and overlook the fact that many so-called "negative" words are *also* associated with God. Words such as "anger" and "wrath" can be found in many passages throughout the Bible (Deuteronomy 6:15 and Romans 2:8, for example).

This study looks at some of the verses that use another of the so-called "negative" words, "hate." These specific verses describe both God and righteous people, as "hating" certain people (or groups of people). Some of the verses even *command* people to hate - at least within the circumstances defined by the context.

We will focus on the way this word relates to "love," and how such verses should impact the way we view our obligations toward God, neighbor and self. Along the way, we will also look at some of the other issues we might face, as we attempt to understand how we should live - issues such as how we should respond when obligations appear to contradict each other.

This study is *not* the final word, as far as defining the relationship between love and hate. We are all still growing in our understanding of our infinite God. We will never fully understand him, but hopefully our understanding will grow as we explore these issues. If nothing more, perhaps we will be a little closer to appreciating the complexity of God's greatness, when contrasted to our feeble attempts to understand his ways (Isaiah 55:8-9; Romans 11:33-36).

Below are three considerations that may help us to better understand some of the issues related to this matter:

#### ***Consideration #1: Context***

First, the Bible uses many words in *both* "positive" and "negative" ways. This is important for us to remember, and it might make it easier for us to accept the idea of the word "hate" being used in both "positive" and "negative" ways. The issue has to do with context: The significance of a word is determined by its context.

Take, for example, the word "jealousy." In 2 Corinthians 11:2, Paul claims that he has a godly jealousy. But in 2 Corinthians 12:20, he lists jealousy as one of the sins that he fears is among the Corinthians. In the space of two chapters, Paul uses the same word to

describe a godly characteristic, as well as a sinful characteristic. The context - the reason for the jealousy - determines which way we interpret it.

Another example is the word "love." Most of the time, this word is used in a good sense, but it can be used in a bad sense when it is directed toward the wrong thing. Two examples of the word "love" being used in a *bad* sense are: John 12:43, in which Jesus refers to people who love to receive praise from other people (rather than from God), and 2 Timothy 3:4, which makes reference to people who love pleasure more than they love God.

### ***Consideration #2: Varying Degrees of Emphasis***

Sometimes the Bible will refer to a characteristic that must be expressed to *all* people, but it will tell us to express that characteristic to a greater degree toward one person, than toward another. For example, Scripture tells us that we must be ready to do good to *all* people, but that we must do this *even more so* to believers (Galatians 6:10).

In some cases, a certain characteristic may be expressed toward one person to such a great degree, that it appears to be absent toward others - even though it isn't. There may be times that this *apparent* absence of that characteristic could be described by the *opposite* characteristic. For example, if the specific characteristic were "love," this lesser expression of love, when extreme, could be described by the word "hate." If the Bible were to use the word "hate" in this manner, it would not be intended as an *absolute contradiction* of the word "love," but as a *relative contrast* to the greater expression of love given to the other person (or group). [Of course, if some other person were opposed to that "lesser expression of love," *they* would describe it as "hate" in the worse sense of the word.]

### ***Consideration #3: Different Levels of Priority (The Precedence of Some Obligations Over Others)***

The Bible tells us that we must obey people who have authority over us. It also tells us that we must obey God. These two commands should never conflict, for the human authority should *never* want a person to do something that is contrary to God's will. But we live in a sinful world, so we need to know what to do, if the human authority *does* want us to do something that goes against God's commands.

In answer to this question, the Bible says that certain obligations take precedence over others. In the above scenario, Scripture tells us that our obligation to God is *greater* than our obligation to human authorities. And so, in this case, we would choose to obey God, rather than men (Acts 4:19; 5:29).

If we were to arrange all our obligations according to their level of priority, our highest level of obligation would be to God - to love and obey him, and to give him the highest place in our lives. Our second-highest level of obligation would be to other people - to love them as ourselves, and to consider their well-being as more important than our own. (This would include obeying them, if they were an authority over us.) Below that we could place a general category that would include any other obligation we may have - to self and to the rest of creation. This third level would also include obligations that are voluntary or optional, religious ceremonial activities, etc. [Since our focus here is on an issue pertaining to people and to God, we will be focusing mainly on the "self" aspect of this third level. Additional comments about this third group can be found in PART 6 and PART 7 of this study.] Sin and the devil have been placed in a fourth category, since we have *no* obligation to them, other than that of opposition and hatred.

How do these levels work? First, if we are living in obedience to God's Word, we will want to fulfil *all* our obligations, if possible. We will want to fulfil *both* of the "two greatest commands" (Matthew 22:37-40). In other words, we will want to honor and glorify God, and give him first place in our own lives (the first command). We will also want to do the types of things that bring good into other people's lives (the second command).

However, if a situation arose in which a *conflict* occurred between our obligations, such as obligations to God and to other people, we would have to give precedence to the higher obligations. If necessary, we would have to "sacrifice" (or "give-up") the lower obligation, in order that we could fulfil the higher obligation. Specifically, obligations to God would take precedence over *any other* obligations we might have. And obligations to our neighbor (that is, to other people) would take precedence over all other obligations *except* obligations to God. [Note that "fulfilling obligations to God" is *not* the same as "performing religious activities." See PART 7.]

Everyone faces decisions that involve priorities and values, and one's choices will be a reflection of those values. Because of this, those who *accept* the Word of God will often make choices that are the opposite of those made by people who would rather *ignore* it. This is because those who do not accept the Bible's order of priorities will not accept the decisions that reflect those priorities. When they see people living by these priorities, they may respond with anything from mere disapproval to extreme hostility. They may even try to force the person who loves God to go *against* the Bible. In some parts of the world, choosing to follow God may even result in persecution or death. (More Christians are killed today, than at any time in the past 2000 years.)

The person who loves God will reflect it in his choices. It may require very difficult decisions, such as the choice between denying Christ, or acknowledging Christ (and because of that, suffering persecution and possible death). Or it may be a simple decision, such as whether or not to spend some time each day reading the Bible and praying. In either case, the decision made will be a reflection of the person's heart, and will prove whether or not his love for God is genuine. (His love for God will also be reflected in his love for other people.)

## PART 2:

### A More In-Depth Look at How Various Levels of Obligations Relate to Each Other

- With a Focus on the Issue of "Love"

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*A Chart Showing the Relationship That Exists Between Various Kinds of Obligations*

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Level 1:</b> Obligations to God ↑ <b>Level 2:</b> Obligations to People (our "Neighbors") ↑ <b>Level 3:</b> Other Obligations (including obligations to one's self) ----- X ----- <b>Level 4:</b> NO Obligations to Sin and the Devil (except to oppose and hate them)</p>	<p><b><u>Notes About This Chart:</u></b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Our obligation to love God is greater than any other obligation we have. This love is expressed in various ways, such as trust, obedience, humility, moral purity, etc.</li><li>2. Our obligations to people (our "Neighbors") applies to both friends and enemies (Luke 10:29-37).</li><li>3. For our purposes, "Other Obligations" includes whatever is not mentioned in the above two categories. This may include obligations to one's self; "religious" activities; obligations such as promises and commitments, which are voluntarily made; and any obligations we may have to the rest of creation (animals, plants, etc.).</li><li>4. We have <i>no</i> obligation to sin and the Devil, other than that of total hatred, opposition, and avoidance. In many respects, this opposition is actually an expression of love (and obedience) to God, and love for neighbor.</li><li>5. If a "conflict" occurs between obligations on two <i>different</i> levels, the higher level must be given precedence over the lower level.</li></ol>
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## *Application of this Chart to the Concept of "Love":*

### **First... WHAT IS LOVE?**

This word is often abused and misused. When the Bible uses this word, it is normally used with a focus on others; it is not self-centered. Three of the basic characteristics that are a part of this kind of love are: commitment, care, and, when directed toward God or neighbor, a willingness to sacrifice, or give of, one's self.

The New Testament was originally written in Greek. Two New Testament Greek words are frequently translated as "love" in English translations of the Bible. One of these words refers to a *friendship* love. The other - the one most frequently found in the N.T., and the focus of this present study - refers to a *commitment* love.

This commitment love focuses on others and their well-being (including their spiritual well-being). It can be used in reference to the commitment that should exist in a marriage relationship, but it goes far beyond that, applying to *all* our relationships, to God and to other people. This type of love is *not* dependent on the response of others; it can exist even in hostile circumstances.

### **Level 1 - Obligations to God:**

We must love God with the totality of our beings - Matthew 22:37; Mark 12:30; Luke 10:27.

We must love God more than we love our closest family members, more than we love our possessions, our own selves, or anything else in creation. When a conflict arises between our love for these and our love for God, we must choose to love God, rather than the rest of these - Matthew 6:24; Luke 14:26-27, 33; 16:13. (See also John 12:25.)

## **Level 2 - Obligations to Neighbor:**

We must love our neighbor as much as we love ourselves - Matthew 7:12; 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 6:31; 10:27.

We must be willing to value our neighbor more than we value our own lives - John 15:13; Romans 12:10b; Philippians 2:3(+).

We must be willing to show this love even to our enemies - Matthew 5:43-48; Luke 6:32-35; 10:25-37. (See also 1 John 4:20.)

## **Level 3 (a & b) - Other Obligations: a) to Self, and b) Any Other Obligations Not Listed Elsewhere:**

We *do* love ourselves, at least in some ways - Ephesians 5:29 (we don't *hate* ourselves). This is also implied in the "love your neighbor *as yourself*" passages (Matthew 22:39, etc.). [Note that these passages are not *commands* to love ourselves. Rather, they express the fact that we *do* love ourselves. More often than not, our problem is that we love ourselves *too much* and need to be told to *stop* doing so (Romans 12:3, Philippians 2:3, etc.).]

[Our focus here is on the relationships between God, people and ourselves. The other things that are included in this category will also have a lower priority, compared to our obligations to God and neighbor. Additional comments about them can be found in PART 6 and PART 7, below.]

## **Level 4 - Obligations to Sin & the Devil:**

[Sin & the Devil must *always* be hated/opposed/avoided.]

## **PART 3:**

### **What If There Appears to Be Conflicts Between Different Moral Obligations?**

As already shown, there are different levels of obligation, with some taking precedence over others. A person who does not understand this, or who refuses to acknowledge it, will be very quick to see "contradictions" any time obligations on two levels coincide. But the truth of the matter is that there is no genuine contradiction in such cases. The higher level obligation *always* takes precedence over the lower. It is only when the conflict occurs between two obligations on the *same* level, that we might have to deal with the issue of "contradictions." And even then, it might not be a *genuine* contradiction.

Suppose we were facing a situation in which our obligations to one person appeared to be incompatible with our obligations to another. Since both of these obligations are on the same level (involving two different people), we could reach the conclusion that, in these circumstances, we were facing a genuine contradiction. After all, if we couldn't fulfil our obligations to *both*, we would have to choose between the two - choosing in favor of the one person, possibly even to the detriment of the other. But before we reach such a conclusion, we should consider various issues that influence, or define, the nature of the obligations. Examining these will often resolve the apparent conflicts and show that we are *not* faced with a genuine contradiction.

#### ***The Issue of Context***

Perhaps the first thing we should consider is the *context* of the obligation. This involves two issues: First, we must look at the context which defines the obligation itself. Second, we must look at our own context or circumstances, which determine the extent to which the obligation applies to us.

First, the obligation itself exists within a context. The nature of the obligation, along with the reasons for its existence, may define or limit the extent to which it applies to us. As we examine our potential obligations, we may discover that some are applicable only under certain conditions - or not at all.

Here is an example from the Old Testament: God gave various rules and regulations to Israel. Some of these rules, such as the Ten Commandments, are a reflection of God's moral requirements for *all* people, and are applicable to us, even today. (Even the commandment about not working on the Sabbath reflects the basic requirement that we are to give part of our time and attention to God, rather than *always* focusing on our normal day-to-day activities.) There are other rules, such as certain ceremonial regulations, which had application only within the context of the Jewish nation. This was because of the agreement (covenant or promise) they had made with God. God-fearing



non-Jews, who were not under this agreement, did not have an obligation to follow those regulations. [Note: Because the Jews continually failed to fulfil their obligations, God has replaced that covenant with a new one. Today, we live under a different covenant - one that is based, not on our actions, but on what Jesus did on the cross - Jeremiah 31:31-34; Hebrews 8:7-13.]

The second issue involves our own "personal context." The circumstances we find ourselves in will often define or restrict the extent to which an obligation applies to us. For instance, though we have an obligation to love *all* people, the extent to which we can put this love into action will vary from person to person. We may have this same obligation of love to people who live *near* us, as well as to those who live *far away*. But our ability to express that love may be greater to those who live nearby, simply because God has placed us in closer contact with them.

This specific example, regarding the extent to which love can be expressed (to those living nearby and those living far away) will be used below (in PART 4), to illustrate a different principle. But before we do that, we should first look at some basic issues which may help us better understand this problem regarding obligations and potential conflicts between them.

### ***Why Do Such "Contradictions" Exist?***

To better understand the apparent conflicts between obligations, we need to step back and look at the broader perspective. Ultimately, there are *no* contradictions between God's commands. Yet there are two factors that influence our perspectives and often make it difficult for us to see this truth.

The first factor, by itself, is not a problem. This is the fact that we are *finite*. Whereas God is *infinite* and has an *infinite* comprehension of reality, we are *finite* and have a *limited* comprehension of reality. We must remember, however, that being finite is *not* the same as being sinful; rather, it is the *necessary result of being created*. (Living as though we *aren't* finite is a much greater problem, than being finite!) And though we cannot have knowledge that is *unlimited*, God has made us so that we can have knowledge that is *accurate*.

The second factor is much more serious - namely, that we are *sinners*. All of us have sinned, and this sin has influenced and distorted our perception of reality. Sin has also taken our "finite-ness" (which, by itself, is *not* a problem) and turned it against us. Altogether, sin has blinded us so that we cannot see truth as clearly as was once possible. It has darkened our understanding, so that what we can see is often permeated with false conclusions and error (Ephesians 4:17-19).

All of us were born trapped in sin, and those who remain in this condition have no hope of *ever* having an accurate (though finite) comprehension of reality. But God offers us

hope; he offers a change for all who are willing to submit to his authority, and to accept his free offer of salvation. For those who are willing to turn to him and to yield to his will, he begins the process of using the Word of God to "renew" their minds. What this means is he uses his Word to change the way we think. This is a change whose effects reach to the very foundations of our thoughts. It is an ongoing process that continues the rest of our lives and does not reach its completion until we take part in the resurrection. The final changes will occur when we see Christ, and at that time, all the effects of sin will be totally eliminated.

In the meantime, as finite beings, it is our duty to *grow* in wisdom and maturity. We can do it, because God has given us his Word, to enable us! As we submit to what the Word says, we will grow in our understanding of how to deal with the more complex issues of life. And when this happens, many apparent conflicts will clear-up, like fog dissipating in the hot sun.

Because we are not yet perfect, there will be times that we are unable to see the answer to our conflicts and moral dilemmas. When this happens, we must remember that it is not God's fault: It is *we* who have sinned, not him. As we grow in Christ, the answers to some of these difficult issues will become more obvious.

Our imperfections, though real, need not be a source of constant discouragement. We do not have to close our eyes to the fact that imperfections are present, but we can "balance" this truth with something else that is also true: Every time God uses his Word to change something in our lives, it gives us a good reason to thank him and to be encouraged. Each change is evidence that God has begun a good work in our hearts (and minds). And what he has begun, he has promised to someday bring to completion (Philippians 1:6, etc.)!

### ***The Danger of "Half-Truths"***

At birth, sin was already a part of our nature; its effects permeated every aspect of life - even the way we think. One of the ways it has affected our thinking is by fragmenting our perception of reality. Because of this, we tend to view issues in a way that could be described as "half-truths." This issue is explored in greater detail in the next section.

## **PART 4:**

### **The Problem of "Half-Truths"**

How does this occur? How does our thinking become permeated with "half-truths"? Sin leaves us with a natural tendency to focus on some aspects of the truth and to neglect (or even reject) other aspects. This neglect introduces error into our own perspectives, and reduces our ability to see the truth in the views of those who have focused on the "opposite" set of facts (also mixed with error). When confronted with those "opposite" facts, such as during an argument or disagreement, we can easily become *increasingly* one-sided. In the end, we are in danger of completely losing sight of the "opposite" principle or truth. And though we may be fully convinced that we are defending truth, we will actually be denying parts of it (the complementary aspects that we can no longer see) or explaining it away, being fully convinced that it is erroneous. We will also be defending the error that has crept into our own perspective and replaced the truth we have neglected.

It should be mentioned that this tendency to cling to "half-truths" is usually *not* conscious or deliberate. It is a part of the nature we were born with - a nature we must continually fight. This one-sided focus can also be influenced by many other factors. It can even be due to an over-reaction to the wrong, one-sided emphasis of others!

Ultimately all this is due to the fact that we were born with a "sin nature" that has fragmented our perception of reality. It has affected us at the very foundational level of *how* we think, by changing our perception of *the very nature* of facts. This has made it natural for *complementary* facts to become viewed as *contradictory* statements that cannot co-exist in one's frame of reference. When this happens, it forces us to side with one or the other, thus polarizing our perspective.

This polarization of views is a major reason for disagreements among people. In just about any issue, people have a tendency to focus on only part of the truth. Since different people focus on different sets of facts, they tend to take sides. And though each side may contain truth (mixed with error), each side loses the ability to see the truth that the opposing side has focused on - all the while becoming increasingly blind to the shortcomings of its own views. Each side begins to view its own perspective as "right" and the other's as "wrong." As the perspectives become increasingly polarized, misunderstandings turn into major disagreements. Tension and hostility increases, which, if allowed to go to its extreme, may result in major strife. At times, it has even resulted in wars between nations.

A one-sided focus is a horrible trap, because it can be self-perpetuating. Not only does it tend to intensify, when the other person stresses the "opposite" set of facts, but it can cloud one's perception, so that a person becomes unable to see the full truth, *even when confronted with both complementary aspects of it*. This one-sided emphasis will cause him to misinterpret (or re-interpret) the other person's view, so that, rather than seeing it

as an attempt to accept *all* of the truth, he sees it as nothing more than a modification of the opposing "wrong" view, or simply as an "inconsistent" view.

### ***An Example of How "Half-Truths" Can Affect One's Thinking***

Just about every argument has two "sides." Because of this, many examples can be found, to illustrate the way that "half-truths" can polarize people's thinking, and cause them to line-up on opposing "sides." Most disagreements about the Bible begin on this level - though by the time the views have fully developed, neither side understands the "opposite" side clearly enough to realize it.

However, we will illustrate this "half-truth" concept with the principle already mentioned, concerning love expressed to "nearby" and "far away" people. As already mentioned, we have two complementary truths:

- 1) We have obligations *both* to those living nearby, and to those who are far away.
- 2) Our obligations to those who live nearby may be greater, simply because God has placed us in greater contact with them.

To maintain the full expression of truth, we must give each of these equal emphasis. We must not emphasize one aspect of this truth, at the expense of the other, or we will have started the journey toward "half-truth" - even though it isn't our intention to do so.

Now suppose we were to over-emphasize the needs of those who live nearby. Once we lost sight of the complementary truth (the needs of those who live far away), our one-sided focus would begin to be a justification for neglecting those who live farther away. Since we no longer saw our obligations to them, we would begin to close our eyes to their needs - including their *spiritual* needs. Even if we acknowledged their needs, we would see no obligation to do anything about it - and might even try to discourage others from getting involved. There have been times in history, that missionaries were opposed by "Christians," who told them that they should stay home and "let God worry about the heathen"!

We *do* have obligations to those who live far away. When we choose to ignore these people, we are sinning - not only against them, *but also against God*. After all, who is it who told us to evangelize the world? Since it is *God* who commands us to share the good news with everyone, an unwillingness to fulfil such obligations is a sin against God, as well as against the people we are avoiding. [Another evangelism issue that involves "half-truths" is whether we should emphasize helping people with their *spiritual* needs or with their *physical* needs. Many people focus on one and condemn those who focus on the other. But, though preaching the good news may be the *greatest* obligation, wouldn't

dealing with physical needs be the *second greatest* obligation? If both are obligations, then shouldn't we do both and neglect neither?]

Suppose, on the other hand, we were to become over-focused in the other direction, on the needs of those who live farther away. This could lead us to neglect those who live nearby. Eventually, we could begin to "idolize" people who travel overseas to evangelize, while despising those who stay home - and considering them "less spiritual." Today, there are many people who consider "foreign missions" to be a lot more "spiritual" than "home missions."

The obligation for us to love those who are "far away" does not necessarily mean that we must go overseas. We need to start with the neglected "neighbors" who live near us. God can provide an opportunity for us to reach out further, if he is willing. But if *we* are *unwilling* to start where we are, then going overseas could become an "escape" from obligations we have to those who live *nearby*! It would be a sin against both our nearby neighbor and God.

While trying to live-out this truth, we must work together as a unit. After all, not all of us can go overseas and not all of us will stay home. Whether our own role is at home or abroad, we must affirm the need (and value) of each other. We must work to avoid the extremes of *both* of these one-sided errors!

### ***Expanding This Example Further***

We must constantly be on guard, because this unbalanced emphasis can show itself in many ways. To illustrate this, we will expand our "nearby / far away" illustration into a more-generalized principle. Instead of referring to people as living "near" or "far away," which focuses on *geographical* distance, we will simply focus on the concept of "distance."

Geography is just one of the *many* kinds of barriers that can exist between people - barriers which create "distance" between them. There are also political barriers, social barriers, economic barriers, and cultural barriers - to name a few. These barriers can be quite difficult to break down; this "distance" can be quite difficult to get across. And because of this, a person will often find it easier to express "love to neighbor" to someone who is in *similar* circumstances, than to someone who has a *significantly different* background.

As before, we can divide this principle into two complementary truths, one that emphasizes interaction with those who are *similar to us*, and one that emphasizes interaction with those who are *different from us*. As before, we could (if not careful) take this generalized principle and begin to over-emphasize one of these two focuses, and ultimately end-up with a "half-truth." And if we did this, it would not be long before we began to use it as an *excuse* for neglecting the other, un-emphasized obligation, or even

denying that it exists. And as before, we would soon begin to justify our actions, without even realizing that they were disobedience and sin. (As before, this would not necessarily be a deliberate, willful act, but rather, a natural consequence of our one-sided focus.)

In this specific example, when people start to become one-sided in their thinking, they tend to focus on the easier task of expressing love to those who are *similar* to them. (There are a few exceptions.) People tend to find it easier to love those who love them back. Yet God requires us to love even people we *don't* like - those who are not easy to love, those who are "unlovable." More than that, Scripture reminds us that this love for those who don't "pay back" with love is one of the characteristics that distinguishes between genuine and counterfeit "children of God" - compare to Matthew 7:43-48.

Since we find it easier to express love to people who are "like" us, it is very easy for us to have a one-sided focus on them. It is very easy to neglect, and ultimately forget, our obligations to those who are less-easy to love. And once we lose sight of these obligations, it becomes very easy to make-up good-sounding excuses that "justify" our avoidance of those who are "different" from us.

When we justify and excuse our avoidance of those who are "different," it reinforces our negligence. We become increasingly blind to our *need* to love them. And we completely lose sight of the fact that our neglect is a sin against both them and God - see Matthew 25:31-46. (All the while, we would be claiming that we were obeying the "truth"!) And so, even though Jesus came to *tear down* such barriers (Galatians 3:26; Colossians 3:11), we would have distorted this principle, and turned it into an excuse for *reinforcing* them.

Here is another example - this time from events recorded in the Bible: The religious leaders of Jesus' day were often guilty of this sin of "half truths." In their case, they often focused on minor issues (such as ceremonial rituals) while neglecting the things that God considered to be of *greater* importance (such as love for neighbor). (See Matthew 23:23.) At other times, man-made rules crept in (because of their one-sided focus), and these often conflicted with the truth they had begun to ignore. (See Mark 7:1-13.)

Before we decide that these religious leaders are "horrible villains," we need to remember that they didn't *plan* to be wrong! They did all their "research" - examining various commentaries and writings that they would have described as being "the godly wisdom of Spirit-led men of the past." In the end, their views were strongly influenced by, if not completely derived from, the writings of these past religious leaders - and they lost sight of the Word of God itself. Jesus, on the other hand, focused on "the Word of God itself" - and in doing so, he incurred the wrath of the religious leaders, who accused him of ignoring (and teaching against) those "sacred" teachings that they, themselves, had accepted.

We must be careful to *not* follow the example of these past religious leaders. *And we must have the humility to realize that we are not inherently better than they.* We, too, can find it very easy to put our trust in the commentaries and writings of those we consider "godly, Spirit-led men of the past." (Of course, different people will come up with

different, often-contradictory, lists of who those "godly, Spirit-led men of the past" are.) Unless we submit ourselves to God and his Word, we, too, are fully capable of doing the same types of things that the leaders of Jesus' day did. We, too, could end up opposing and persecuting those who accepted "the Bible as is" - just like professing Christians have done to other professing Christians, down through the centuries. That is one of the reasons that Scripture includes so many warnings against their way of life.

### ***A Few Final Comments About Fulfilling Complementary Obligations***

Even when we *acknowledge* complementary (seemingly opposite) obligations, we must do our best to *avoid* the temptation to de-emphasize one, in favor of the other. In some cases, the obligations - in order to fulfil them all - might require Christians to work together *as a group*. In this case, each would have to not only do his own part, but would need to consciously affirm the value and necessity of those who had a greater focus on the complementary obligations. Both must be affirmed and encouraged; neither is to be neglected, ignored, or opposed. [This working as a *group* is not to be used as an excuse for *individuals* to neglect complementary obligations, when they have the ability to fulfil them.]

There are other times when we must deal with obligations that *cannot* be dealt with on a group level. There may be obligations that appear to conflict, that we, alone, must deal with. In such a case, we must remember that, when it comes to obligations, the basic rule remains unchanged: When at all possible, we must fulfil *all* our obligations to *everyone involved*. At times, it may be quite tempting to *excuse* obligations we don't like, by claiming that they "conflict" with other obligations, even when they don't. But this is *not* an option for the disciple of Jesus.

There is one final comment that must be made, related to this issue of "half-truths." All along, we have been stressing that, whenever we face an issue, we must accept *both* sets of complementary facts. We could describe this as a "both-and" perspective. Most people tend to focus on one set of facts or the other, viewing them as contradictory concepts. This could be described as an "either-or" perspective - something that we must vigorously resist.

However, there *is* a place for "either-or" thinking, in the Bible, when it comes to the issue of compromise. Scripture tells us that we *cannot* serve both the true God and idols. As Elijah said, we must choose one or the other - we cannot serve the Lord and Baal (1 Kings 18:21). As Jesus said, we cannot serve both God and money (Matthew 6:24). There is no fellowship between light and darkness, righteousness and wickedness, Christ and the devil (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).

## **PART 5:**

### **Suggestions and Final Comments for Dealing With Obligations and Conflicts Between Them**

#### *Some Suggestions*

The following are some suggestions for making decisions about moral obligations. They may be helpful when there is a need to deal with obligations that appear to conflict. However, some of these suggestions may also be helpful in general decision-making, when there is no conflict, and we simply don't know how to respond.

- 1) The devil often uses "secondary" issues to distract us from more important issues. When there appears to be a conflict between two moral obligations (both being on the same "obligation level"), we should look to see if there is a *different* issue present, one related to a *higher* level of obligation. If this is the case, the "conflict" is actually of secondary importance, compared to the greater obligation. If we change our focus to the *real* issue, the apparent conflict may even vanish!

A good principle to remember is this: Quite often, when we see only two alternatives, there is a third one - or even more - just out of sight.

- 2) There are times that Scripture gives us complementary principles to help us determine how we should respond in certain situations. These principles may sometimes look like "opposites," and if we misunderstand their complementary nature, we could very easily mistake them for "contradictions." Actually, these "opposites" are like boundaries, which define the limits of our acceptable responses. In such cases, our obligation is to avoid going *outside* these boundaries. In such situations, the circumstances (as well as additional principles or clarifications in God's Word) would determine which response is the best choice, or if we should choose a response that exists somewhere between these two "extremes."

An example of two complementary principles (or boundaries) is the advice given in Proverbs 26:4-5, about answering a fool. Sometimes we should answer a fool... and sometimes we shouldn't. (The last half of each verse shows what we want to avoid.)

- 3) Sometimes our natural reaction to a situation will give us a clue as to the best choice of action. Even sinful inclinations may be instructive - if we don't give-in to them! If we know what our "flesh" (our old, corrupt sinful nature) would want to do, then we should consider doing the opposite! (One caution, however: There times in which the flesh may want to do the *right* thing, but for the *wrong* reason. Paul gives an example of this in Philippians 1:15-17.)



- 4) On the other hand, the contrasting principle is also true. If we can determine which course of action is the most compatible with the character and nature of God, this may help us in deciding our course of action. This principle may be especially important when we have to decide between various options that are *not* sinful. (Sometimes the options might not be actually sinful, but may range from a *passive* "neutral" to an *active* "bringing honor and glory to God.")
- 5) Sometimes we may be in a situation in which we have two or more good options, with one of the options being the best of all. Choosing the best of the options would be preferable, but circumstances or personal weaknesses may limit our ability to do this. In this case, we are *not* doing wrong by choosing one of the other options.

An example of two good choices, with one being the better of the two, is seen in 1 Corinthians 7:1-7. The preferred choice is to remain single. But since many people do not have the "gift" that is necessary for remaining single (v. 7), marriage is also a good choice.

- 6) Sometimes there may actually be no good solution. The sins we commit have consequences. If a conflict between obligations is due to sin that has already been committed, it is possible that there may be *no* satisfactory answers to the dilemma. The only good response would have been to *not* sin in the first place, for sin has horrible, and often inescapable, consequences - both on the guilty person, as well as on others. After the sin has been committed, we may find ourselves with only one option left: to minimize the resulting damage that we have caused. "Damage control" can be a very unpleasant job! (Note: We should be careful that we don't "blame" God, when there are no good solutions for the problems that we, or others, have created.)

### ***Final Comments***

Ultimately, regardless of what happens, whether our choices result in good or bad consequences, we must focus on the God who saved us. We must remember that we were all born as sinners with corrupt minds (Ephesians 4:17-19). We were in a hopeless situation, but the God of hope came to change that. When we turned to God, he started working in our lives, to change the way we think. When we pay attention to the Bible and allow it to influence our lives, God uses it to "renew" our minds. As this happens, we will grow in our ability to make right choices.

Growth takes time, so we may find ourselves making wrong choices or not being sure how to respond. We must remember that the perfection we desire is not yet here; it will arrive at the resurrection, when we see Jesus face to face. In the meantime, while we are still growing (and making mistakes), we still have many reasons to rejoice. After all, God is, *even now*, accomplishing many good things in our lives - and there is so much more to come!

As we look forward to the day we will see Jesus, it is our duty to use the Word of God to transform the way we think, with the goal of being able to know God's good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:2). We must continue striving for that goal, realizing that we are not there yet, and there will be times that we have to make decisions in which we *don't* know the best choice. Even when we fail, we can take courage in the fact that we are not alone: God is still with us. We serve a God who has promised to use *all* that happens - both the good and the bad - to accomplish good in our lives! (Romans 8:28) And so we can commit the situation to God, regardless of the consequences, and allow him cover it with his grace.

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## **PART 6:**

### **Additional Comments about Our "Other Obligations"**

In PART 2, a chart was given, that illustrated the relationships between our various obligations. Obligations to God ("Level 1") take precedence over *all* other obligations we may have. Obligations to other people ("Level 2") has the second highest priority. All other obligations come below these two levels. Here in PART 6, we will take a brief look at some of these other obligations.

It is not our purpose to explore the various items in this category in great detail. Most of them get their significance from the way they relate to the higher obligations we have to God, neighbor, and (sometimes) self. Often these higher obligations will define the issues. When examined alone, torn from such a context, the items in this "Other" category tend to lose their significance.

Many of these obligations are temporary in nature, or limited in application. In some cases, they may even be voluntarily imposed upon one's self. Few of them are associated with *commands* that place us under some specific kind of obligation. And even when such commands do exist, our higher obligations (regarding God and people) would take precedence, if conflict were to occur between them.

A few observations are given below:

#### ***Concerning love for "Self":***

We *do* love ourselves, at least in some sense (Ephesians 5:29), but there is *no* command for us to do so. Our tendency is to love ourselves *too much*. And because of this, there are commands which tell us to redirect our attention toward God and toward other people! (Romans 12:3; Philippians 2:3-11)

It has been suggested that even people who commit suicide love themselves. They may claim to hate themselves, but it is actually their *circumstances* that they hate. They love themselves so much that they don't think they deserve whatever the circumstances they are experiencing. They think they deserve *better*, and would even kill themselves, if they thought it was better than their present circumstances. (Sin and emotions can radically distort one's perception of reality.)

***Concerning love for other things in creation (both living and non-living entities):***

Here we are focusing on the "non-human" aspects of this world. When God created Adam and Eve, he told them to "subdue" the earth and to "rule over" the living creatures (Genesis 1:28). They were to learn about creation and to work with it, in ways that would result in good things being accomplished. (They were *not* told to pollute and destroy - activities which have become quite normal, in a world now influenced by sin.)

If we examine Scripture, we will discover that there is *no* command for us to love these things - at least in the sense we are told to love God and neighbor. Yet there may be some *other* sense in which these aspects of creation may be loved or cared for. Scripture tells us, for instance, that a righteous person will take care of the needs of any animals he may own (Proverbs 12:10).

More often than not, however, our problem has to do with loving things *too much* - a sin which occurs in many forms, and which is guaranteed to destroy us, unless we destroy it first.

Concerning love for creation and love for God: *Never* should love for any part of creation take precedence over love for God. To give *any* created entity (even other people) precedence over God is idolatry (Romans 1:18-32).

Concerning love for creation and love for people: We must realize that people are more valuable than anything else on earth. The whole world is not worth as much as one person's life (Mark 8:36-37). God cares for everything in the world, but he considers people to be the most valuable. Jesus illustrates this, by telling us that we are more valuable than the birds and the plants (Matthew 6:25-34). And since this is the way God values people, we also must value people more than we value the other things of creation.

Even the actions of animals should be guided by this principle concerning the value of people. For example, if an animal is aggressive and deliberately kills *people* (not accidentally or in self-defense, etc.), Scripture tells us that the animal must be put to death (Genesis 9:2-6). In contrast, no such command exists for the person who kills *animals*. People have been given permission to kill animals, and at times, God has even commanded them to do so. (This can be illustrated by the regulations regarding sacrifices). This killing of animals by people is *not* considered a sin. [There may be an exception to this, if the killing is being done for mere entertainment or as an expression of cruelty. This seems implied in Genesis 49:5-7. (Even then, it would not be a sin worthy of death.)]

### ***Concerning voluntary obligations***

A person may voluntarily choose to place himself under an obligation, such as when he promises to do something for God or for another person. Voluntary promises, covenants, and oaths do not apply to everyone, but only to those who make them. (This may include situations in which they are made through a representative.) They should be kept, not broken, even if keeping them results in personal discomfort (Psalm 15:4b; Ecclesiastes 5:4-6).

There are some situations in which voluntary obligations would have to be broken, such as: 1) if keeping them would cause a violation of a higher obligation, and 2) (with some limitations) if a higher authority would negate them. (See an example of this, regarding vows made to God, in Numbers 30:6-15.)

### ***Concerning love (or devotion) to religious activities:***

Because this issue is so greatly misunderstood, an entire section will be devoted to it. In today's world, the concept of "religion" often bears little or no resemblance to what the Bible defines as "religion." (See PART 7.)

## **PART 7:**

### **Concerning Love (or Devotion) to Religious Activities**

*What is "religion"? What are "religions activities"?*

The New Testament defines the Christian's "religion" as an expression of love for God and neighbor. In James 1:26-27, we can see both aspects of this love, in the definition given for "religion." First, the expression of love for *God* involves personal holiness (not being polluted by the world's influences). Second, love for *neighbor* involves a desire to help the helpless (such as impoverished widows and orphans). It is important to realize that a Christian's "religion" is not the *cause* of his salvation; rather, it is the *result* of his salvation. Don't confuse *cause* and *effect*!

"Religion," as the word is normally used, involves "religious activities," such as ceremonies, rituals, fund-raising events, committees, lessons, certificates, programs, membership lists, buildings, activities (sometimes every day of the week), man-made rules, contests, the practice of "good works" (in order to "get to heaven"), the use of gimmicks to "bring them in," and the like. These are just a few of the things that come to people's minds, when we talk about the "Christian religion" (as they would call it). Add to this the popular idea that the "Christian religion" is just one of *many* competing "religions" found in the world, all of which claim to be "the way"! (The word "religion," as normally used, brings Christianity down to the same level as man-made "religion.")

Quite clearly, very little of the world's concept of "religion" has any support in the Bible. Even the way most "Bible-believing Christians" use the word goes *against* the way the Bible uses it! The "religious" activities of many churches bear little resemblance to *anything* that the Bible tells us to do. And it bears even less resemblance to the Bible's concept of "religion."

Christianity itself is not a *religion*, but a *relationship*. Its primary focus is not centered around human activities ("religion") but on knowing Jesus Christ, as Lord, Savior and friend. It is based on the objective truth of Scripture, which reveals to us everything we need to know for life and godliness - not only for eternity, but also for life in this present world. This relationship comes into being because of the work of the Holy Spirit, who uses God's Word to lead us into the truth. And this is not merely some type of subjective, mystical "spiritual" truth, but solid, objective, historically accurate truth. The Spirit leads us not only to agree with it intellectually, but also to live by it, with all of our being. And all this is based on what Jesus did on the cross to save us, not on the works that we ourselves do.

The "religion" of Christianity (as defined by God) comes only *after* this relationship has come into existence. It is a *response* of gratefulness, expressed by those who love God, who's minds and hearts are becoming increasingly influenced by the life and conduct of their friend, Jesus, as recorded in Scripture.

Concerning the types of activities that most people consider "religious" (ceremonies, rituals, activities, etc.), most of these things are *not* commanded by God, but were invented by people. They would rate *very low* among the levels of priority. They could even be considered sinful, if they were being done, while God's commands were being neglected.

There are some religious activities mentioned in the Bible, which were commanded by God. Yet even *these* are given a lower priority than our obligations of love for (and obedience to) God, and love for neighbor. Furthermore, these activities often had limited applicability, and could be restricted to a specific context.

Examples of this limited applicability would include many of the ceremonial commands and rituals found in the Old Testament. They were applicable to Israel, because of an agreement the nation made with God, during the time of Moses. The Jews were required to do them. Yet at the same time, many of those regulations were *never* required of God-fearing *non-Jews* (except for those non-Jews who voluntarily chose to commit themselves to the Jewish way of life).

### ***The Issue of "Religion" vs. Obedience***

We need to remember that "religious activities" and "obedience to God" are *not* the same thing. Consider the following three examples:

1. King Saul was very concerned about religious activities, such as making sacrifices. But he didn't bother to obey God. As a result, he brought God's judgment upon himself (1 Samuel 15:22-23).
2. During Jesus' day, the religious leaders were "religious" about every activity in life. But they neglected what God considered more important, and received a scathing condemnation from Jesus (Matthew 23).
3. Before the apostle Paul was saved, he was one of the most "religious" people of his day (Philippians 3:4b-6). Yet when he met Jesus and was saved, all those religious activities lost their significance. They became as nothing, compared to the value of knowing Christ (Philippians 3:7-11).

Quite clearly, a person can do "religious activities" (as the world defines "religion") *without* obeying God. A person can do many of the "religious activities" found in churches *without* being saved! In contrast, the "religion" that *Jesus* requires is an expression of obedience, which can only occur *after* a person is saved. An unsaved person may *imitate* some of the things Jesus requires, but it would be *impossible* for him to do them for the *reasons* that Jesus wants them done. (He may, for instance, do them for "secondary" reasons - such as for the sake of "humanitarian good," while at the same time ignoring the "primary" reasons - such as the honor and glory of God.)

How does *obedience* to God express itself? Some of the ways include: 1) a morally pure lifestyle, 2) a desire to honor and glorify God in all that one does (1 Corinthians 10:31), 3) a lifestyle of relying on God (trusting him) in all that one does, and 4) an on-going fellowship with him (a focus on God's Word and on prayer). Even *love* is an expression of obedience. After all, isn't love for God and neighbor a response of obedience to the two greatest *commands*?

### ***A Summary: Two Things We Must Never Forget***

The first thing we must never forget is that religion and obedience are *not* the same, and that obedience must take precedence over religious activities. In terms of priority levels mentioned above, love and obedience to God, and love for our "neighbor," *always* takes precedence over love for (or devotion to) "religious activities." It is only when the *more important* expression of obedience (and the accompanying love) is being done, that the *secondary* expression of "religion" has any value.

The second thing we must never forget is that Christianity involves a relationship - a *friendship* - with the God and Creator of the universe. Many people have "religion." They fill their time with all sorts of "religious activities," but they never become friends with their Creator. So their religion is meaningless, and even offensive to God.



## **PART 8:**

### **A More In-Depth Look at the Use of the Words "Love" and "Hate"**

When we examine verses that use the words "love" and "hate," we discover that they tend to fall into two categories.

#### **1. Some passages use these words in an *absolute* sense.**

In this case, "love" and "hate" are mutually incompatible, and *cannot* co-exist. For instance, a verse may tell us that we must have love, rather than hate, for a specific group. Used in this *absolute* sense, a person *cannot* have both love and hate at the same time; it is simply not an option.

#### **2. Other passages use these two words in a *relative* sense.**

In this case, they are *not* mutually incompatible. Such verses normally (if not always) involve a *contrast* - either between two different groups of people, or between people and God. Often we will be told that one group (or individual) is to be loved, and another group (or individual) is to be hated, at least in some sense. In such a context, we *can* (and *must*) have both love and hate at the same time - in whatever way they are defined by the context of the verse.

The verses in this second category stand in such contrast to those found in the "absolute" category, that, if their "relative" nature was not understood, they could be easily misconstrued as a contradiction to the "absolute" verses!

Below is a more in-depth comparison of these two types of love-hate relationships:

[See table on next page.]

<b><u>DEFINITION AND EXPLANATION</u></b>	If the two words are being used in an ABSOLUTE sense:	If the two words are being used in a RELATIVE sense:
The situation (or example)	Suppose we are reading the Bible and we discover a verse that tells us to love and to <i>not</i> hate...	Suppose we are reading the Bible and we discover a verse that speaks of hate in a "positive" manner... [The word "love" (or something equivalent) may also be in the context.]
Brief definition	In this context, the two concepts (love and hate) are incompatible. If we are told to have love for a specific group, we must have love for <i>all</i> within that group (as defined in the context) and hate for none.	Depending on the context, this may involve: 1) having love for <i>some</i> but not for others, or 2) having different degrees of love - more for some and less for others. (This "love-hate" contrast may involve individuals within one group, or from two different groups, as defined by the context.)
Further explanation	We must express this type of love to <i>all</i> within the group, even to those who may be considered "unlovable." In <i>no</i> instance can hate (in the <i>absolute</i> sense) be present. If it does exist, we are sinning.	Used this way, love and hate can <i>co-exist</i> . In fact, the very expression of love to the one individual (or group) may, at times, <i>require</i> that it not be expressed to another, or that it be expressed to a lesser degree. In such a case, to love the one would, of necessity, imply "hate" (in a <i>relative</i> sense) for the other.
How these two types of concepts interrelate (or co-exist)	Love, in the <i>absolute</i> sense must still exist, even when we must have "hate" (or "less love") for someone, in the <i>relative</i> sense. Hate in the <i>absolute</i> sense is still <i>not</i> an option. As for our actions, we still have <i>no</i> right to do anything hateful (sinful) against anyone.	We may have to hate, oppose, or have less love for some people, in the <i>relative</i> sense - especially when they oppose what is holy, righteous and pure. But in the <i>absolute</i> sense, we must still desire (and encourage, when possible) their ultimate good - which includes their <i>eternal</i> good. We must not have a desire for harm (especially <i>eternal</i> harm) to come upon anyone - even upon our enemies.

This analysis focuses on the so-called "negative" concept of "hate," but there are other so-called "negative" concepts that could be examined. For example, there are a few passages in which the apostle Paul pronounces judgment upon someone. (See 1 Corinthians 16:22

and Galatians 1:8-9.) These verses do *not* use the word "hate," but rather, the word "curse" or "anathema." These verses involve people who have rejected the truth and (at least in the Galatians passage) are trying to mislead others. (The Galatians passage also extends the judgment to angelic beings, if *they* were to mislead people with a false gospel.)

The focus of these passages is on Paul's desire for justice, rather than on a vindictive desire for the people to experience a horrible punishment. If they were to repent (which is almost certain to *not* happen, in these instances), Paul would surely be delighted. As it is, these people are having a horrible influence - one that could possibly lead others to eternal ruin. Both God and "neighbor" are being sinned against.

Interestingly, Paul uses the same word ("cursed") in Romans 9:3 and applies it to *himself*. He says that he would be willing to be condemned (or accursed), if it would result in the salvation of others who have rejected Jesus. He would be willing to take on himself what they deserved. (Surely this is a strong testimony against anyone who would suggest that Paul had a vindictive, "non-loving" spirit, in the other verses!)

Now, back to the issue of "love" and "hate." We will first look at one of the ways these *absolute* and *relative* concepts can apply in our own lives. This will be followed by some verses from the Bible, where "love" and "hate" are used in these two different ways.

<b><u>APPLICATION AND ILLUSTRATIONS</u></b>	If the two words are being used in an ABSOLUTE sense:	If the two words are being used in a RELATIVE sense:
A possible way these <i>absolute</i> and <i>relative</i> uses of "love" and "hate" could be applied to life in a family situation	Parents are to love <i>all</i> of their children (whether or not the children are good), rather than favoring one and rejecting (hating) the others. This love is to be unconditional - it must exist even when the parent must punish (or in some other way correct) the child. [Of course, the child may describe such punishment as "hate," but it could not rightfully be called that, except, perhaps, in the relative sense.]	A husband is to love his wife and <i>not</i> another woman. When the word is used in this relative sense, he would "hate" the other woman. If the word were used in an <i>absolute</i> sense, he would not "hate" the other woman, but would love her and desire what is ultimately good for her - just like he must for <i>all</i> other "neighbors." [This love would, of course, include a desire to maintain a morally pure of relationship with her. It would be totally opposed to the world's distorted concept of "love" - which is often nothing more than a disguised form of lust and self-gratification.]

(Continued next page.)

<b><u>APPLIC. AND ILLUS.</u></b>	If ... used in an ABSOLUTE sense:	If ... used in a RELATIVE sense:
<p>Verses that illustrate this use of the words "love" and "hate"</p> <p>(NOTE: Most of the verses given here illustrate the <i>relative</i> sense of these terms, since that is the main focus of this study. If we were to examine all of the passages which use these two words, we would probably discover that these two words are used more frequently in the <i>absolute</i> sense.)</p>	<p>Matthew 5:43(+) - God loves his enemies. In this (the absolute) sense, he does not hate them, but shows kindness to them. Scripture tells us that we must follow his example. [Other verses also mention his kindness and patience toward those who do not love him - Romans 2:4; 2 Peter 3:9, etc. Note that none of these verses cancel the reality of future judgment: Those who reject God's kindness will reap the consequences of their actions.]</p> <p>Luke 6:27-31 - Love your enemies... [verses 32-36 - If you don't, you are no better than the pagans, who have love for those who love them back.]</p> <p>Matthew 22:39; Mark 12:31; Luke 10:17 - Love your neighbor. (This would include <i>all</i> "neighbors," rather than just a few favorites).</p>	<p>Luke 14:26 - Our love for God, the Creator, must surpass the love we have for anything in creation. This passage in Luke applies this principle to people. It shows us that our love and loyalty for God, must be so great, that our attitude (and actions) toward family and self could be described by the word "hate." [Other passages, such as Matthew 6:24 and Luke 16:13, show an application of this principle to possessions: We cannot serve/love both God and money.]</p> <p>Malachi 1:2-3 and Romans 9:10-13 - God loved (showed favor to) Jacob and his offspring; but he "hated" (did not show favor to) Esau and his offspring. (He also had anger and wrath because of sin committed by Esau and his offspring.)</p> <p>Psalms 5:5 - The LORD hates and destroys those who do evil, but he has mercy for the righteous. (See also Psalm 11:5; Hosea 9:15.)</p> <p>Psalms 139:21-22 - David hates and abhors those who hate God, but he has complete love for God. He also asks God to examine his heart and to lead him in the way of life. [David understood God's moral requirements; he wasn't writing this psalm in ignorance! If his intense hatred were the sinful type, he wouldn't have asked God to examine his heart, and to look for anything that was offensive in him, especially right after mentioning his hatred!]</p> <p>Ecclesiastes 3:8 (possibly used this way) - ... a time to love, a time to hate.</p>

## **PART 9:**

### **A Few Things You Can Do (For Further Study)**

- Think about these verses. How do they apply to you, in your life? As you try to apply them, how can you avoid falling into the trap of "half-truths"?
- Look at some of the other "negative" concepts, and see how these principles apply. (Don't ignore the "positive" concepts, though!) [You could start by looking at some of the verses that use the words "jealous" (or "jealousy") and "zealous" (or "zeal"). They are actually the same group of words, in the N.T. Greek!]
- Explore some of the theological and moral issues found in the Bible. Look for truths that complement each other - truths that are often viewed as "contradictory" concepts. In what ways does the Bible avoid the "half-truths" that people often hold to? (In many issues, people will think from an "either-or" perspective, while the Bible will proclaim a "both-and" perspective.)

You may wish to start with the focus of John 1:1, and ask the question, "Is Jesus *God*, or is he *with God*?" The way Scripture deals with this issue is typical of the way it deals with all other issues of this type. (An "either-or" perspective would result in all kinds of error.) Another major issue would revolve around the question: "Is God sovereign, or are people responsible for their actions?" (Most people view these two concepts as contradictory.) However, you don't need to start with a major issue: Just about *any* issue, large or small, can be instructive, for learning how to deal with complementary truths.

- Look at various issues and conflicts in your life. Try to see beyond your own perspective, in order to discover if there are some "half-truths" in the opposing perspectives. Make it your goal to accept *all* the dimensions of truth. (This may also require you to consider the possibility that you may have inadvertently reached erroneous conclusions in your own perspective.)
- Though it is not the main focus of this study, you may also want to look for instances in which an "either-or" perspective is *necessary* - specifically regarding the issue of compromise. You could look in the Bible for instances in which the people took a "both-and" perspective in the matter of truth and error, where they compromised their actions (by tolerating sinful conduct), where they tried to serve both God and idols, etc. What were the consequences of their compromise - especially the long-term consequences? What lessons can you learn from these examples?

Also, examine your own life, so that you can apply what you have learned. Are there areas in which you have made compromises, or are being tempted to do so? Do you "flirt" with sin? Give serious thought to what the Bible says about compromise (whether by example or by direct statement) and deal with it, before it destroys you.